

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

REFORMATION NUREMBERG:

THE PRINTERS' ROLE

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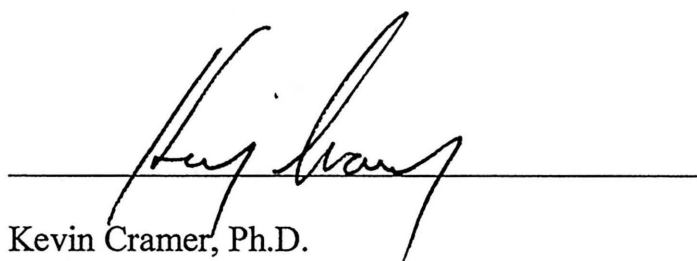
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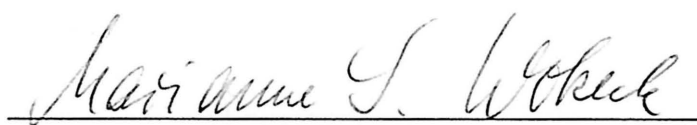
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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kevin C. Robbins", written over a horizontal line.

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Introduction

Historians have dealt with the role of print in the Reformation in a variety of ways, but the role of the printer has not received such close attention. As Cole points out, “Those who cast the type and rolled the ink are frequently overlooked by scholars because they are regarded as mere cogs in the wheel of the printing revolution.”¹ Yet, it was the printer who acted in the role of publisher, determining what would be printed and when. It was he who regularly consorted with intellectuals, urban elites, or informed visitors and advanced issues for public discussion. The printer belonged to a new, if ill-defined, group of artisans that was not subject to the restrictive rules governing the older, sworn crafts. He might have begun his career apprenticed to a goldsmith or a form carver, but as a printer he might associate with the first citizens of the city and find himself in a position to exercise popular influence. This thesis explores the role of the printer in an urban setting at a crucial point in the Reformation, Nuremberg in the years 1524-25.

These were crisis years. Nuremberg, which led other free imperial cities in its move toward Lutheranism, had to contend with threats of ban and interdiction from imperial and ecclesiastical authorities and simultaneously with radical political and ideological agendas advanced by its own citizens. Peasants gathered for revolt during these years, threatening to join forces with the city’s large artisan population and perhaps change the fabric of society in unpredictable and dangerous ways.

¹ Richard G. Cole, “Reformation Printers: Unsung Heroes,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (3) (1984): 327.

As with many broad movements, the issues raised by the Reformation manifested themselves in a number of dilemmas. First and most obviously, new, uniform practices had to be agreed upon to replace those of the Old Church. Once those familiar guideposts were removed, a certain moral disorder seemed to appear, reflected in cases of bigamy as well as displays of greed that accorded ill with the teachings of Christian love. The Reformation seemed to liberate some people from all standards, and these fell to the City Council to deal with.

Another issue was the dissolution of the monasteries and convents, with the attendant question of the disposition of the monks and nuns who lived there, how they would live, and how they would dress. Most monks and a number of nuns welcomed the end of these institutions, but others, including cloistered relatives of influential citizens, were spirited in their defense. How could the cloisters be eliminated without conflict?

A third issue had to do with social reform, which for many was entangled with religious reform. How should justice among the various estates be defined in an era when every man was a priest? Peasants governed by Nuremberg embraced the teachings of radical preachers like Andreas Carlstadt and Thomas Müntzer, raising the specter of social revolution even as Nuremberg patricians agreed that their demands were not unjust. Maintaining social harmony in fractious times was the task of the City Council.

In all of these issues and more, the printers of Nuremberg played a significant role. Public opinion, as this thesis shows, existed in early Reformation Nuremberg, where

it was formed and influenced by print. During the years 1524/25 no fewer than 118 pamphlets were printed in Nuremberg, 113 of them in German. They were designed for quick and profitable distribution to a local audience and, as Robert Scribner and others have pointed out, were meant to influence the illiterate as well as the literate.²

The chief primary source for this work is this collection of pamphlets. Thanks to the work of Hans-Joachim Köhler and other scholars, the complete, original texts of some 5,000 pamphlets printed in Germany between 1501 and 1530 have, through the Tübingen project, been preserved on microfiche. The stated objective of the Tübingen project is to achieve the complete documentation of all pamphlets printed in sixteenth-century Germany. That objective has not yet been reached. For example, the pamphlets listed in Köhler's *Bibliographie der Flugschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts* stop at the letter S, where the third volume of part I ends. Until the fourth and final volume appears, students will have to content themselves with an extensive, but not exhaustive, list of pamphlets printed between 1501 and 1530. Indeed, even the 5,000 pamphlets listed from A-S represent only those preserved in their entirety. At least one pamphlet cited in this thesis, Thomas Müntzer's *Exposé of False Faith* (1524), is not listed in Köhler's bibliography, though its text is thoroughly described secondary literature, where its title page is reproduced.³

² Robert Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (London: Cambridge University press, 1981), 2, 3.

³ Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer, Apocalyptic Mystic and Revolutionary* trans. Jocelyn Jaquiere (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 146.

Pamphlets cited as an original sources in this thesis include Köhler's fiche number and grid numbers (e.g., Fiche 1382/#3653) after the customary documentary notes. A full set of these fiche can be found in Libraries Storage (Undergraduate) at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind., among other locations. Pamphlet titles are rendered here in English except for footnote and bibliographical references, where the original German is used. Wherever original German appears, the orthography of the time is followed as closely as Microsoft® Word 97 SR-1, the word processing program used to produce this thesis, permits. Spelling of original German also follows the original sixteenth-century text.

This thesis includes five chapters. The first establishes the setting, the City of Nuremberg, which in many ways was unique among the free imperial cities of the day in its governance and social relations. Chapter 2 establishes the presence of public opinion in sixteenth-century Europe in general and in early-Reformation Nuremberg in particular, describing the nature of public opinion and advancing some recent theories on how it was formed. Chapter 3 explores the pamphlet as a tool of social discourse, defining it as an important part of a larger matrix of communication. Chapter 4 addresses printers and the world of print, indicating the many economic and political pressures printers faced. Chapter 5 follows the products of the eight print shops that operated in Nuremberg during 1524/25, using the pamphlets its printers chose to print—and reprint—as a window on the aims of this new and influential type of skilled technician.

Finally, this thesis analyzes the information gathered. It suggests where the printer saw himself on the issues of the day and how he dealt with the dynamic factors,

Chapter 1

Nuremberg in the Early Reformation

The Holy Roman Empire on the eve of the Reformation included some sixty-five imperial cities, all of which in theory belonged to the emperor, but were in fact virtually autonomous. City council minutes, statutes, court records, sermons, correspondence, and pamphlet literature compiled in these technologically advanced urban settings comprise a scholar's treasure. As Seebass has pointed out, such "copious sources . . . allow one to make a broad survey of the gradual process or the sudden reversal of the Reformation."¹ They also allow for broad conclusions. Bernd Moeller in *Reichsstadt und Reformation*, for example, argued that the Reformation was adopted by citizens of the imperial cities as a means of defending old, communal values against perceived centralization by oligarchs and princes.² The Reformation, in effect, sanctified cities. It brought into the communal, urban orbit sacred institutions heretofore answerable to Rome, thus aligning sacral and urban policy interests. Steven Ozment, by contrast, concluded in *The Reformation in the Cities* that the Reformation *desanctified* cities. He argued that the Reformation freed frustrated citizens from unbearably complex requirements of salvation imposed by the late medieval church and that city councils were gradually brought around by advocates to see that their interests aligned with Protestant interests. Only then, he argued, could the Reformation take hold in Germany's imperial cities.³

¹ Gottfried Seebass, "The Reformation in Nürnberg," in *The Social History of the Reformation* ed. Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathan W. Zophy (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1972), 17.

² Bernd Moeller, *Reichsstadt und Reformation* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1987).

³ Steven Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

Of course, broad surveys necessarily maintain a wide focus, seeking patterns and drawing general conclusions from the experience of a collection of cities. The differences among Germany's imperial cities were sometimes substantial, and the experience of the city of Nuremberg in particular was said by Bernd Moeller to represent an exception to the experience of many.⁴ In pursuing the role of the printer in Reformation-era Nuremberg, then, it is logical to begin with a close look at the "*micro-corpus christianum*"⁵ in which Nuremberg printers worked. For contrary to the patterns discerned by Moeller and Ozment, in Nuremberg the Reformation was introduced from above.

The free imperial city of Nuremberg was governed by pragmatic men. Its powerful City Council comprised forty-two councilors, including thirty-four patricians who alone were qualified to occupy influential committees and offices. These sons of the city's "ancient families" had "learned the mechanics of government in lowly jobs and had risen to high office through a rigorous process of selection."⁶ Their proven ability to manage the city's affairs, attend to its defense and negotiate for its privileges gave them the right to govern by tradition and common consent. Their chief aim within the city was social stability and civic order. Outside the walls, their ongoing objective was security against encroachments by territorial nobles and the acquisition of further concessions and privileges from imperial and ecclesiastical authorities. If the Nuremberg City Council

⁴ Seebass, "The Reformation in Nuremberg," 18.

⁵ Ibid, 19.

⁶ Gerald Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century: City Politics and Life Between Middle Ages and Modern Times* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 74.

maintained any political principle in connection these goals, it was freedom of action to do what was necessary to achieve them.

Strauss argues that the desire to maintain the *status quo* was paramount among these men of the City Council, for the city's continued good fortune was thought to lie in tried and true formulas, not innovations that could easily lead to imbalance and disorder. Yet, when confronted by situations that did not lend themselves to traditional solutions the councilors were prepared to improvise.⁷ They needed such improvisational abilities in the mid-1520s, when the Reformation introduced a series of simultaneous religious and political dilemmas that threatened the *status quo* in a number of new and different ways.

Nuremberg was in a reasonably healthy state, both economically and politically, when those combined dilemmas presented themselves. Grants of privileges (the right to hold markets, collect tolls, mint coins, levy justice) had been accumulated by the city over the centuries from emperors who found that concessions to imperial cities helped create a loyal counterbalance to territorial nobles and welcome urban support in times of conflict between emperor and pope. Nuremberg's population of 25,000 was enclosed within no more than 1.6 square kilometers, yielding an estimated population density of 15,625 per square kilometer. Homes were built narrow and tall, reaching seven or eight stories. In time of peace burghers even took up residence in the 150 defensive towers ringing Nuremberg's inner and outer walls, where their drying laundry could be seen by those approaching the city. Within a 25-mile radius of this compact environ lived an

⁷ Ibid., 96.

estimated 20,000 additional souls. Many of these worked the land, but others who lived nearby traveled daily into the city to work.

Many in Nuremberg were successfully engaged in finishing trades, ranging from goldsmithing to bell founding. That, rather than the production of raw materials or speculative banking, was what shaped the character of commerce and social relations in early modern Nuremberg. Standing in Franconia between the Main and Danube rivers at the convergence of twelve major trade routes, Nuremberg was an excellent place to exchange information and goods. Hawkers, peddlers, and local officials constantly moved between town and country, while carriers, merchants, colporteurs, and itinerant artisans linked Nuremberg with other marketing regions from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. The city imported the raw materials it needed (e.g., copper ore from Hungary) or goods in which it did not specialize (e.g., cloth from Flanders). It balanced trade by exporting the fine metal products for which it became noted across Europe. Everything from needles to trumpets to clocks to plate armor was crafted in Nuremberg, where a special municipal officer, the *Pfänder*, confirmed with the aid of deputies the quality of all finished goods. Anything found to be substandard was destroyed without compensation to its maker.

Such penalties were levied on the Council's authority. This might seem harsh to the modern eye, but the collective good was valued over individual benefit in early modern Nuremberg. Those who produced shoddy goods or who attempted to defraud customers were considered social offenders, with their punishment heartily endorsed by

common citizens. Hans Sachs, the popular Nuremberg shoemaker and meistersinger, once made up a half-serious list of punitive measures suitable for such people, including suspension in a basket above a cesspool for bakers who cheated on the size or weight of their loaves.⁸ The communal laws enforced by the City Council accorded with the popular view.

Each member of this Nuremberg community of interest had an assigned role, which also involved his or her social standing. This standing defined him or her and was expressed in such details as housing, clothing, gestures of deference, and style of address. Printers fell within a thin, middle rank of highly skilled technicians and educated artists who were essentially free from the *Pfänder's* scrutiny. Their craft, a fairly new one in the general scheme of things, put them in frequent contact with scholars and patricians. This helped elevate the printer's calling above the artisan's, despite the handwork involved. Yet, as we shall see, some printers still felt close enough in spirit to the lower strata that they undertook significant risk to promote humbler interests in print.

Nuremberg's social levels, or *Stände*, were not significantly different from those in other, similar cities in Central Europe. They bear listing, however, along with their respective values and their relations with the other *Stände*, if the social dynamics of early modern Nuremberg and the printer's place within them are to be understood.

The social group with the greatest clout in Nuremberg was formed by patricians. Sixteen Nuremberg families could trace their lineage back to the thirteenth century.

⁸ Ibid., 105.

Others of more recent origin (but none later than the fourteenth century) were also admitted to the patrician *Stand* for a total of forty-three. It appears that most such families rose to distinction through their success in commerce, though their business years were largely behind them.⁹ Now they were called by God to govern. While they associated comfortably with true aristocrats and mimicked noble clothing and noble pursuits (e.g., hunting and jousting), urban patricians kept at least one foot in the urban world, where their duties lay.

Chrisman claims that as a group, patricians insulated themselves from common citizens.¹⁰ Their dress and deportment did set them apart, as did their exclusive social life. Yet, Strauss and Grimm both report that Nuremberg patricians were to be seen daily walking and talking among commoners, attending the same churches, paying their share of taxes, and concerning themselves with the most minor of municipal problems (e.g., ill-treatment of servants or a peasant's small property matter).¹¹ Nuremberg patricians were subject to the same laws as other citizens, and if caught at wrongdoing were vigorously prosecuted. In one sensational case in 1469, Nikolas Muffel, Nuremberg's highest city officer and head of one of the city's oldest families, confessed under torture to embezzlement from the city treasury. Muffel was hanged. There were few such cases to report.

⁹ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 78.

¹⁰ Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform, German Lay Propaganda Pamphlets, 1519-1530* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1996), 33.

¹¹ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 82, 83; Harold Grimm, *Lazarus Spengler, a Lay Leader of the Reformation* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1978), 11.

Nuremberg's patrician ranks were closed to newcomers after 1521. The Council ruled that year that only those families officially invited to dance in the *Rathaus* were to be recognized as patrician, and thus *ratsfähig*, eligible for the office of mayor.¹² Thus, the city's patricians officially comprised its governing order. That essentially gave it complete power, for the Council enacted statutes, enforced laws, and authorized Nuremberg's civil and criminal systems of justice, serving in both cases as the court of last resort. It was the city's legislative, executive and judicial rolled into one.¹³ From its authority there was no appeal, and from its official gaze no privilege of privacy. Maladroitly handled, such power could have created an oppressive, not to say a punitive, atmosphere, but sources suggest that the Council handled its power with care influenced by a strict sense of duty. This, in the context of Nuremberg's communal culture, may have been the key to its success. When asked how the Council governed so effectively, one member answered, "With kind words and heavy penalties."¹⁴

A new Council was formed annually by five electors selected from the old Council, and rarely was a councilor not re-elected unless he was too old to serve. Interestingly, no law prohibited a commoner from membership in the City Council. Indeed, by tradition eight members of the Council were always commoners, men selected from one of the eight oldest crafts in the city. Their job was chiefly to keep an eye on their betters and assure the artisan ranks that nothing was happening that would violate their trust in the government. In Nuremberg, however, patricians appear to have deserved

¹² Nuremberg actually had 26 mayors at a time, 13 senior and 13 junior, though they rotated in and out of active duty in the course of a year.

¹³ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 68.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

the trust of their fellow citizens. Though as a group they were ambitious and careful to assure the continuity of their rule, these urban patricians held selfless leadership as their highest value. In Nuremberg at least, they appear largely to have lived up to that ideal.¹⁵

Just below the wealthy patricians came the high civil servants, who served their city as lawyers, advisors, and administrators. In many cities such men comprised the permanent governing officials, but in Nuremberg the self-perpetuating City Council maintained that role. High civil servants were hired by the Council to advise it in matters of law and diplomacy and to see that its directives were carried out. Such men gained their position through education, and it was largely on this that their status depended, along with authority granted by the Council. They might not be invited to social functions held for patricians, and might be addressed as “*ersam bescheiden Herr*” (honorable, modest sir) but they were part of the same intellectual circle as the patricians and often lived nearly as well. In their University education and their travels these men had studied classical texts and the Bible and had associated with Christian humanist scholars. They were, Chrisman argues, the “engine of the humanist movement.”¹⁶

This was an influential rank. While no doctor of laws could be admitted to the Nuremberg Council, five or six doctors of law were retained full time to advise it, along with four additional lawyers for everyday consultation. The city secretaries, or *Stadtschreiber*, were particularly influential, for they were the only outsiders permitted to attend all Council sessions, recording every decision, drafting every letter, and reading all

¹⁵ Ibid., 107.

¹⁶ Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 36.

incoming correspondence. Nor were their duties confined to writing. Lazarus Spengler, one of Nuremberg's two *Oberste Stadtschreiber* (first secretaries) during the Reformation, performed diplomatic missions for the Council, drafted laws, and "spoke so sensibly that the Council was pleased to follow his advise," according to one contemporary biographer.¹⁷ Education and service were the learned civil servant's ideals. If we may classify them along with their patrician masters as Nuremberg's "upper rank," then about five percent of the city's total population may be so qualified.¹⁸

Beneath these high civil servants came a level of skilled, minor civil servants and technicians. It is here the printer belongs. This was a rank in formation, thin and ill defined. It included educated artists, teachers, apothecaries, engineers, and musicians, none of whose work lent itself to the established, procedural rules by which the older, sworn crafts were governed. Though they were citizens first, this group had less cohesion than those above and below it, for its members had less in common with one another and no associations to bind them. Thus, there were fewer enforced values and ideas to constrain them.

That is not to say this was a rebellious stratum, merely a new one. Albrecht Dürer, whose astonishingly skilled woodcuts and engravings were renowned throughout Europe, belongs in this category. He was the son of a goldsmith, but worked under little constraint and associated comfortably with the city's patricians, suggesting the upward mobility of the highly skilled. Printers, who often began their careers as apprentices to woodcutters,

¹⁷ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 87.

¹⁸ Günter Vogler, *Nuremberg, 1524/5* (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1982), 26.

letter painters, or goldsmiths, found themselves consorting with learned officials on the same basis as educated artists like Dürer. A few had themselves been university educated. As Eisenstein observes, literacy was required of journeyman printers who wished to become their own masters, thus combining book learning with manual labor. "Insofar as a new combination of manual and mental labor resulted, the shift from artisan to artist thus appears to be similar to other occupational mutations."¹⁹ Printers had a foot in both worlds, the world of the manual laborer and of the intellectual.

Scholars have identified but eight print shops operating in Nuremberg in the years 1524/25, not a great number for such a major center of commerce. Augsburg and Strasbourg each had ten during those years, Cologne had eleven, and Wittenberg held a full dozen.²⁰ Yet, the number of print shops in all these places fluctuated over time. Nuremberg, for example, gained another five shops by 1530, even as it lost four.²¹ It was in any case a limited number, so it is not farfetched to imagine that Nuremberg's printers thought of themselves as members of a small but elite group.

The largest single social group in Nuremberg, the artisans, included those who labored at the sworn crafts that made and sold the goods that sustained the city and advanced its fortunes. Such citizens belonged to guilds in most cities, but not in Nuremberg. Nuremberg's guilds had been outlawed since the fourteenth century, after an

¹⁹ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change, Communication and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 252-3.

²⁰ Josef Benzing, *Die Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts im deutschen Sprachgebiet*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1982) 14-18, 235-239, 352-356, 438-442, 497-501

²¹ *Ibid.*, 352-358. The numbers cited take account only of new shops, not new proprietors of old shops.

unsuccessful artisan's revolt. The City Council blocked every attempt to revive them:

In 1506 when apprentice pouchmakers, acting without authorization, expelled one of their fellows for being of illegitimate birth and induced their masters to appeal to the Council to recognize the principle of legitimacy in apprenticeship rule, the mayors minced no words in setting them straight: "Masters and apprentices of this craft are reminded that we have no guilds in our city, not in this craft, nor in any other craft."²²

Thus, no organized craft group could bring pressure on the Council. Since guilds were not allowed to form in Nuremberg, the social controls that flowed from them were missing as well. As suggested by the passage above, craft organizations were inclined to police their own, and in other cities did so by established tradition. In Nuremberg, the Council alone reserved the right to set social standards and enforce behavior. Its power in this regard was genuine, but the Council never held the frequent meetings, banquets, and other social gatherings through which craft guilds in other cities kept tabs on their members. In fact, it discouraged such meetings and closely monitored those that took place lest something resembling a guild take form. Thus, when the Reformation came to Nuremberg it encountered a population that enjoyed greater social dynamism than did the inhabitants of cities with established guilds.

In place of the craft governance exercised by guilds, Nuremberg instituted a five-member tribunal known as the *Rugsamt*, including four Council members and one *Pfänder*, a hired officer whose function has been described above. This group had absolute authority over every aspect of production and commerce, including wages,

²² Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 97.

working conditions, and hours. Members of the artisan rank appear to have accepted the rule of the *Rugsamt*, for they were not entirely excluded. Each of the “sworn crafts” in Nuremberg was asked to elect a “sworn master” to represent it before the Council, and as we have seen each of the eight oldest crafts was permitted to advance one of its own to membership in the City Council, albeit in a nominal role.

Probably the most famous of Nuremberg’s craftsmen is the cobbler/poet Hans Sachs. While it is hard to say with precision how closely his views represented those of his fellow artisans, it is a fact that Nuremberg citizens bought his pamphlets and went to see his *Fastnachtspiele* (Shrovetide plays). If not so important a figure as Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* would have modern audiences believe, Sachs and his messages to the citizens of Nuremberg seem to have struck a chord. The honesty, integrity, and dignity of labor come through in his work, as subsequent chapters will describe in greater detail.

Grimm reports that Nuremberg’s artisans, along with middle-rank merchants and shopkeepers, comprised some sixty percent of the city’s population.²³ Vogler places the percentage of Nuremberg’s “middle classes,” including both artisans and skilled technicians, at sixty-five percent.²⁴

Beneath the artisans came the common laborers, whose voice is not so audible.

²³ Harold Grimm, *Lazarus Spengler, Lay Leader of the Reformation* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1978), 13.

²⁴ Vogler, *Nuremberg, 1524/25*, 26.

Day laborers, gravediggers, knackers, bathhouse workers, and prostitutes all had a market for their services in Nuremberg, and beggars, as always, did their best to create one. This stratum includes many of those who lived outside the city's walls and only came in to work during the day.

Yet, the Council paid close attention even to this level of citizen and did so from values of honest, communal labor that so seem to characterize early modern Nuremberg. In 1518 it directed blind and lame citizens to employ themselves by spinning or performing other work within their abilities rather than by sitting in front of the church on a working day.²⁵ A beggar's regulation of 1522 mandated that citizens overtaken by poverty in spite of honest effort be issued a city badge to be worn as a mark that they were worthy of charity, members of the "deserving poor." Some 800 citizens were so qualified, though bread had been distributed weekly to no fewer than 5,000 twenty years earlier to combat a rise in prices.²⁶ There were also special provisions for "poor people who feel ashamed to beg and wear the beggar's badge, either because they think it a disgrace to their parents or a dishonor to their craft."²⁷ As for prostitution, Nuremberg maintained a municipal brothel, as did most imperial cities, but its employees were never forced to consort with customers against their will and were free by statute to leave at any time.

²⁵ Vogler, *Nuremberg, 1524/25*, 25, n. 87.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁷ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 198.

Peasants were not urban dwellers, of course, but thousands of them lived under control of the Nuremberg City Council, for they dwelt within a 25-mile radius of the walls, on lands acquired by the city over the years. Peasants produced the food consumed by the city, and thus were essential to the city's survival, but had no representative on the Council, even in the nominal sense the artisans did. They, along with all those who dwelt in Nuremberg's outlying regions, were governed by the *Landpflegamt*, an administrative unit established in 1513. If wronged, peasants had recourse to a *Bauerngericht* (peasant court) administered by the sons of distinguished councilors as a kind of training ground for aspiring, young patricians. These young judges were joined in 1520 by the city's top legal advisors, which suggests a perceived need to administer a more conscientious level of justice than one provided solely by youthful amateurs.

Thrift, honesty, hard work, and the sanctity of poverty were values common to peasants. Survival in the face of traditional, burdensome obligations, however, was probably the peasants' greatest ongoing issue. Nuremberg's peasants were "taxed, judged, and conscripted in times of need."²⁸ Forbidden to hunt or even to fence their land, peasants grew weary chasing wild animals away from their crops. Restricted in their allotment of timber, peasants sometimes faced cold weather without wood for shelter and fuel. Those near Nuremberg "allowed their fields to grow up in trees because of the timber shortage," suggesting how desperate they could become.²⁹ These were some of

²⁸ Ibid., 51.

²⁹ Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: the German Peasant's War from a New Perspective* tr. Thomas A. Brady, Jr. and H.C. Erik Midelfort (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 75.

the circumstances that made the peasants ripe for revolt, as subsequent chapters will describe.

A final type of person has been saved until last because he or she lived in Nuremberg not as a citizen or a visitor, but part of a special group, the clergy. Council minutes are full of complaints about the clergy, the one group beyond its ability to govern effectively and hold to account. In 1515 a local Dominican prior was found to be conducting a passionate affair with a nun in the cloister of Engelthal.³⁰ The vicar of St. Sebald, one of Nuremberg's two large parish churches, was rumored to be having improper relations with married women. Peasants complained of absentee priests and murderers found sanctuary within the walls of cloisters, all to the disgust of civic authorities. Strauss cautions that these reports of misconduct and general incompetence were no more than "human failings [which] compounded the slovenliness of an aged and deeply entrenched bureaucracy."³¹ Yet, they added to an anticlericalism that was never far beneath the surface in Nuremberg, nor in Southern Germany generally.

It was in 1476, for example, that thousands had flocked to Niklashausen, a village only about forty miles west of Nuremberg, to hear the preaching of a shepherd, Hans Behem, who claimed to have had a vision of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin, said Behem, had advised him that priests should be stripped of privilege and denied the tithes, rents, and contributions they were receiving from tenants and parishioners. Spies sent by the bishop of Würzburg to hear Behem even recorded his urging that priests be killed. The

³⁰ Grimm, *Lazarus Spengler*, 32.

³¹ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 159.

shepherd was shortly captured and executed by Church authorities, but not before thousands of Franconian peasants had flocked to hear him preach his anticlerical message and to ask his blessing.³² Antipathy toward the clergy was obviously a sentiment that could summon immediate followers in Southern Germany.

Such sentiments in cities like Nuremberg took a somewhat different tack than they did in peasant villages like Niklashausen. Nuremberg held six monasteries and two convents within its walls, plus a few others on surrounding lands. These cloisters could not demand rents or services, as could clerical lords like the bishop of Würzburg, but their members paid no taxes, did no guard duty, and were exempt from secular jurisdiction. There had long been the feeling that the city's clergy, particularly its cloistered clerics, were detriments to the community, that they took without giving. As the Nuremberg City Council noted in May 1525, "Among the common citizens [there is] a good deal of slanderous talk [about] this idle people, who live solely off the sweat and blood of others and do nothing at all in return."³³ As we have seen, in Nuremberg that was a serious charge.

Such anticlerical feelings, sharply felt though they were, do not appear to have been appreciably sharper in Nuremberg than they were in other cities. Erfurt, for example, experienced an infamous "assault on the clergy" in 1521 that resulted in destruction of the canons' houses. No such destruction occurred in Nuremberg, but that

³² Richard Wunderli, *Peasant Fires, the Drummer of Niklashausen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

³³ Quoted in Peter Blickle, *Communal Reformation, the Quest for Salvation in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1992), 77.

may be because the Council responsibly policed its citizens. Council records show an abundance of abusive words and mischief directed toward clerics, and, as we shall see, pamphlets printed and distributed in Nuremberg carried anticlerical messages.

The Nuremberg Council had worked for years to gain control of its churches and had met with significant success. As early as the 1380s, the Council secured a papal bull to the effect that the priests of Sts. Sebald and Lorenz, Nuremberg's two largest parish churches, must live in their parishes and that "no part of the income of the two churches might be spent outside the city."³⁴ Using its right to make all decisions regarding the use of real estate within the city, the Council appointed *Kirchenpfleger* (church trustees) who were placed in charge of "all aspects of church management involving property, land, and money."³⁵ In 1474, the Council was granted the right to advance candidates to staff its churches (though the bishop of Bamberg, of course, made the actual appointments) should an incumbent die during one of "papal months" (the odd months) of the year. In 1513, the Council paid 1000 gulden cash to the bishop of Bamberg, plus an annuity of 100 gulden to secure the right to advance candidates for the remaining months of the year.

Thus, before Martin Luther described the distinction between lay and clergy as the "first wall of the Romanists" in *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), the Nuremberg Council had already taken several steps toward leveling that wall. Still, as Kraus points out, "Wittenberg offered what Rome could never offer, fulfillment

³⁴ Ibid., 155.

³⁵ Ibid., 156.

of the last wish of Nürnberg's ecclesiastical policy, ecclesiastical sovereignty in its perfection."³⁶ It is not surprising, then, that the beginnings of the Reformation in Nuremberg can first be detected among its humanist patricians and upper civil servants.

Christoph Scheurl, legal adviser to the Nuremberg Council, was a friend and former classmate of Johann Staupitz, the vicar general of Augustinians in Germany. Staupitz was a noted preacher who often passed through Nuremberg on visitation trips and preached to enthusiastic audiences. In his advent sermon of 1516, for example, Staupitz, who had been Martin Luther's confessor and spiritual mentor, called indulgences into question and spoke of the mercy of God before a receptive audience of elite Nurembergers.³⁷ Scheurl and others gathered to discuss Staupitz's sermons afterward, forming a humanist circle calling itself the *Sodalitas Staupitziana*. The group included the Council's two highest officers, Anton Tucher and Hieronymus Ebner, plus patricians Kasper Nützel and Hieronymus Holzschuher, *Stadtschreiber* Lazarus Spengler, the artist Albrecht Dürer, and a number of others. The group was still meeting in January 1518 when Spengler secured a copy of Luther's "Ninety-five Theses Concerning Indulgences" which it "greeted joyfully and discussed zealously."³⁸ Kaspar Nützel translated it into German to publicize it to a larger population. Nützel was at that time dealing with authorities in Bamberg and Rome about the Council's refusal to allow a sale of indulgences in Nuremberg. As Strauss observes, "Administrative and intellectual

³⁶ Quoted in Seebass, "The Reformation in Nürnberg," 20.

³⁷ Günter Vogler, "Erwartung – Enttäuschung – Befriedigung. Reformatorischer Umbruch in der Reichsstadt Nürnberg," in *Die frühe Reformation in Deutschland als Umbruch, Wissenschaftliches Symposium des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte, 1996* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 384.

³⁸ Vogler, *Nuremberg, 1524/25*, 38; Seebass, "The Reformation in Nürnberg," 21.

concerns once again coincided to give impetus to thought and action in influential circles.”³⁹

Scheurl wrote as early as 1520 that “the patriciate, the multitude of the other citizens and all scholars stand on Luther’s side.”⁴⁰ He may not have conducted any public surveys to validate that conclusion, but when the Council successfully replaced the *Propst* (provost, or chief dignitary) of St. Lorenz with a young Wittenberg graduate in July 1520 and then the provost of St. Sebald with another follower of Luther’s in December 1521, Nuremberg’s citizens were not heard to protest. Provosts in turn recommended preachers, and the appointment of Lutheran preachers at each church soon followed. One such appointment, that of Andreas Osiander at St. Lorenz in March 1522, proved most influential. Osiander’s fearless preaching attracted visiting princes and envoys as well as commoners.

By 1523/4, pamphlets supporting Luther and his doctrines were being published by members of Nuremberg’s middle strata, including Hans Greiffenberger, painter, and Hans Sachs, cobbler. Greiffenberger “confirmed the artisan’s distrust of reason,” contrasting the worldly, who “submitted to the flesh and lived according to their reason and their own will,” to the spiritual, who were conscious of their depravity and were submissive to the will of God.⁴¹ Sach’s *Wächterlied* (Song of the Watchman)

³⁹ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 161.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Seebass, “The Reformation in Nürnberg,” 22.

⁴¹ Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 163, 172.

characterized Luther as the “Wittenberg nightingale,” whose song announces dawn after a long darkness.

At length mobs of Nuremburghers began attacking monks and disturbing monastic services, actions the Council moved to prevent. Yet, that same Council was ignoring the 1521 Edict of Worms, which demanded the destruction of Luther’s books and prohibited their distribution. When a papal nuncio threatened the Council in 1522 unless it published only anti-Lutheran literature and turned heretical preachers over for trial, “there was shouting in the streets, an emergency session in the town hall, and a decision to protect the city’s freedom of action by force of arms, if that should become necessary.”⁴² Later, however, the Council responded to the nuncio in more ambiguous terms:

It has always been the Council’s thought and opinion to conduct itself as pious Christians and obedient members and subjects of the Christian Church and the Holy Empire, to follow neither Luther’s nor any other man’s teachings or to allow such teachings to deflect it from Christian obedience, but only to remain true to the Holy Gospel and the word of God on which alone our faith, our consolation, our salvation depend. In this we will remain resolute until death.⁴³

The Council by now was engaged in a balancing act, pulled between the demands of the Emperor and the Church on the one hand and the unexpected momentum the Reformation had gained among its citizens on the other. While Lutheran preaching was undoubtedly a major contributor to that momentum, one must also point to the growing

⁴² Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 166.

⁴³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 173.

pamphlet literature that extended the life and influence of sermons and, as Matheson observes, acted as a bridge between the theology of distant reformers and “grass roots opinion.”⁴⁴

The imperial diet convened in Nuremberg three times between 1522 and 1524, placing the city under the observant eye of imperial officials who saw very well how the wind was blowing. Emperor Charles V wrote the Council a sharp missive in April 1524, warning it to abstain from Lutheranism and act as a good example in the empire—or to risk the loss of all its imperial freedoms and privileges.⁴⁵

Nuremberg’s top clergymen were in the meantime busily establishing Reformation doctrine. In February 1524, even as the imperial diet sat in Nuremberg, they conducted the first German-language baptism. A German-language Mass was celebrated in May, after the diet had adjourned. Then, on the first of June, the provosts boldly instituted articles for a completely new, evangelical church order, abolishing birthdays of the saints, Masses for the dead and other rituals, and establishing baptism and the reading of the Gospels and Epistles in German.⁴⁶ Communion was to be offered in both kinds, in bread and wine, contrary to established Catholic doctrine that bread alone be offered. Two of the provost’s nineteen articles in effect declared the jurisdiction of the bishop of Bamberg to be at an end.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Peter Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 59.

⁴⁵ Heinrich Richard Schmidt, *Reichsstädte, Reich und Reformation, Korporative Religionspolitik 1521-1529/30* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1986), 153.

⁴⁶ Gerhard Pfeiffer, ed., *Quellen zur Nürnberger Reformationsgeschichte, Von der Duldung liturgischer Änderungen bis zur Ausübung des Kirchensreigments durch den Rat (Juni 1524 – Juni 1525)* (Nuremberg: Selbstverlag des Vereins für bayerische Kirchengeschichte, 1968), 286, 287.

⁴⁷ Vogler, “Erwartung – Enttäuschung – Befriedigung,” 393.

The Council responded sharply when it learned of these changes, admonishing the provosts for making such arbitrary decisions without its knowledge or consent. It directed them to restore the old ceremonies at once (since the provosts and the Council both agreed they were not necessary for the soul's salvation) and retain them until such time as God made His will known through events in other places.⁴⁸ This, the provosts flatly refused to do, claiming any such restoration would violate Scripture.

The Council took stock of the situation, weighed the Emperor's threat against the likelihood of insurrection if it thwarted its citizens in their desire for Reformation doctrine, and then permitted the new divine services to continue. Delegates were sent by the Council to the Imperial Council of Regency and the bishop of Bamberg to cover its action (or lack of it), explaining that it had not consented to these reforms, but could not rescind those that accorded with the preaching of the gospel, and hinting that uproar would result if it attempted to do so.⁴⁹ In the meantime, the Council had effectively allowed the Reformation into Nuremberg.

In September 1524 both provosts were excommunicated by the bishop of Bamberg along with the prior of the local Augustinian cloister, an action that raised the possibility of interdict as well as imperial ban if Nuremberg refused to surrender them. Lazarus Spengler, who reminded the Council that the Emperor could not impose a ban without the extensive legal steps required by imperial law, advised it not to be

⁴⁸ Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, 5,6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 271-6.

“frightened daily by every carnival mask it sees.” He also indicated that the bishop had proceeded improperly, failing to show on the basis of Scripture how the provosts and prior had erred. Spengler finally advised that the imposition of interdict, which could in any case be appealed to a church council, would mean nothing.⁵⁰ The Council duly took the excommunicates under its protection.

The official break with Rome came in March 1525 after the Council, prompted by a doctrinal dispute in the local, Carthusian monastery, announced that it could no longer countenance the preaching of differing doctrines in its city. As a planned national council to resolve such controversies had been forbidden by the Emperor, Nuremberg would hold a friendly colloquy between six Lutheran preachers (including Osiander) and three adherents of the old faith to settle matters. The colloquy, whose three presiding officers were all Lutheran, placed the Catholic participants at a decided disadvantage. Certainly, the Catholics must have felt they had few friends since the city had to provide a body of armed men to get them safely through the streets.⁵¹ At length the Catholic delegates refused to continue at all on the basis that the proceeding had taken on the character of a disputation, which had also been forbidden by the Emperor.

At the colloquy, Osiander delivered a two-hour summary culminating in a plea that the Council wait no longer but settle religious matters in Nuremberg immediately on the basis of Scripture. Three days later the Council made its decision and ordered Nuremberg’s Dominicans, Franciscans, and Carmelites to stop preaching and hearing

⁵⁰ Grimm, *Lazarus Spengler*, 76.

⁵¹ Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, 355.

confessions. With the expulsion of those order's more recalcitrant members, the Reformation in Nuremberg became official.

Nuremberg's patrician/humanist circle had effectively introduced the evangelical movement by exercising its influence within the Council to appoint Luther's followers to the city's churches. Within a very few years the movement had grown to include all ranks within the city, making Nuremberg's Reformation a phenomenon for which none of its social strata could claim exclusive responsibility. Ozment, citing the Council's hesitant behavior at several points, insists that Nuremberg's Reformation fits a general pattern of the powerful being the "last and least eager to embrace it."⁵² Schmidt, acknowledging the political risks the Council ran, maintains that the Council permitted the Reformation, but did not lead it.⁵³ Yet, Seebass points out that the Nuremberg Reformation could never have succeeded without the Council's agreement.⁵⁴ And Strauss argues that the Council actually did embrace the Reformation, chiefly because of the stress Lutheran doctrine placed on human depravity, a viewpoint that accorded very well with Council members' daily experience as governors.⁵⁵

The question of whether Nuremberg's Reformation was a *Volksreformation* (from below) or a *Ratsreformation* (from above) continues to engender discussion, but it may make more sense to view the aims of the Nuremberg Council and its burghers as

⁵² Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities*, 123.

⁵³ Schmidt, *Reichstädte, Reich und Reformation*, 161.

⁵⁴ Seebass, "The Reformation in Nürnberg," 24.

⁵⁵ Gerald Strauss, "Protestant Dogma and City Government: The Case of Nuremberg," *Past and Present* 36 (1967): 38-58.

complementary rather than as mutually exclusive. Humanistic patricians introduced the Reformation as a means of advancing a sincerely held political and religious agenda. If they hesitated when faced with escalating tensions within city walls and political threats from imperial and ecclesiastical authorities, it must be remembered that politics was the calling of that rank. Socially restive burghers, in the meantime, embraced the Reformation message of a priesthood of all believers, which was spread through evangelistic preachers and sustained by scores of pamphlets. If they overrode the Council's hesitation at key moments, it must be remembered that they saw their own power enhanced by their right to read and to interpret scripture, a step toward direct control of religious experience by the common man.

Chrisman, among others, has pointed out that "each revolution had its own system of ideas and purpose which led men and women to act."⁵⁶ In the case of Nuremberg, the Reformation "ball" was passed swiftly from one social group to another. One cannot ignore the agency of print in this process. Luther's "Ninety-five Theses Concerning Indulgences" influenced Council members to the point that one of them, as we have seen, had the piece printed in German to increase its influence. Lazarus Spengler, a high civil servant, authored several pamphlets in praise of Luther even as he provided key legal advice that helped the Council brave the political threats it faced. Educated artists like Hans Greiffenberger and artisans like Hans Sachs each authored pro-Reformation pamphlets, furthering the perception that Church and society were inclusive, and everyone should have a say. Each group influenced the others. As Lazarus Spengler

⁵⁶ Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 229.

wrote to Clemens Volckmer during the March 1525 colloquy, “[I would] like to hear from anyone whether it would be better to wait for insuperable damage from the common man or to take up evangelism so hotly, bringing about uniform preaching, as any authority is bound to do.”⁵⁷

Of course, the Reformation in Nuremberg was far from over. Ozment reckons the full evolutionary span of the Reformation there at thirteen years (1520-1533), dating from the installation of the first Lutheran provost to the issuance of a general *Kirchenordnung* establishing “a clerical bureaucracy and reliable procedures.”⁵⁸ There were many issues to settle beyond the refashioning of liturgical forms. Two immediate issues included the disposition of the cloistered and the treatment of new doctrines that brought social ferment in their wake.

The clergy was no longer set apart in Nuremberg, but now comprised a group of citizens expected to pay taxes, obey civic law, and be subject to civic justice. The Council issued an order in May 1525 directing members of the clergy to become citizens or to leave the city, and in the course of that year seventy-three priests took the citizen’s oath. But not all who were cloistered wanted to leave. Some, including Caritas Pirckheimer, abbess of St. Clara’s and sister of Willibald Pirckheimer, patrician and humanist scholar, were vigorous in their defense of the cloistered life. How could the Council go about

⁵⁷ *Wollt nun gern von ainem yeden hörn, ob es besser were, ainen unuberwyndlichen schaden alhie beim gemainen mann zu gewarten oder sich deß euangelions so heiß anzunemen, damit man doch ainhelling predige, wie ain yede oberkait on mittel schuldig ist.* Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, 355.

⁵⁸ Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities*, 128; Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 181.

vacating St. Clara's and other convents and monasteries without strong-arming helpless (but influential) women and hapless men into the streets?

The issue was divisive. Willibald Pirckheimer, an early advocate of the Lutheran position, had fallen away over the issue of free will, a doctrine Luther rejected but Pirckheimer supported. Pirckheimer, who had seven sisters and three daughters in the cloister, fiercely turned on fellow patricians and officials over the cloister issue. Yet, part of the Reformation's great appeal had been its condemnation of the cloister as a useless drain on resources and a prison of the innocent young. Pamphlets that spoke to this theme, including Hans Sach's *A Discussion on the Vain Works of the Clergy* (1524) and Florentina von Oberweymer's *An Account of How God Helped a Noble Nun Escape* (1524), each went through more than one edition, suggesting the popularity of the subject in Nuremberg. Ordinary townspeople had made it clear through public taunts and attacks on Nuremberg's Franciscans and Dominicans (and even one break-in to harass the nuns of St. Catherine's) that all such religious houses should be dissolved.⁵⁹ Money spent on their continued support and protection could better be directed toward the poor, as could the cloisters' property and goods. Indeed, the Council felt obliged to warn the nuns of Engelthal and Pillenreut against "liberating" any wealth from either cloister as they left, but to deposit it in the common chest.⁶⁰ The Council could scarcely reverse course on this issue without spending a prohibitive amount of political capital.

⁵⁹ Gerhard Pfeiffer, "Albrecht Dürer's 'Four Apostles': A Memorial Picture From the Reformation Era," in *The Social History of the Reformation*, ed. Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathan W. Zophy (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 289.

⁶⁰ Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, 82.

Another set of issues arose in 1524, when the ideas of so-named *Schwärmer* (enthusiasts) like Andreas Carlstadt and Thomas Müntzer first made their appearance in Nuremberg. Carlstadt, once a close associate of Luther's, had broken with that reformer on several issues. Carlstadt opposed infant baptism, interpreted the Eucharist as a symbolic act, and appealed to immediate inspiration, which had the effect of undermining the importance of the church and its remaining sacraments. He repudiated worldly titles and dignities on the basis that Christ alone was the master. And he questioned any civil interference in church affairs, which ran counter to the Nuremberg City Council's ongoing aim to control its churches. Carlstadt would have a church without structural control. Thus, apart from the fact that he presented yet another set of beliefs (Sacramentarianism) to contend with Luther's, his views were troublesome for their political implications.

But if Carlstadt was considered troublesome, then Müntzer was considered dangerous. Thomas Müntzer, an ordained priest and another early follower of Luther, diverged widely from Luther's path when he concluded that man's spiritual journey was fueled not by the influence of Scripture, but solely by the direct, individual experience of faith. Such experience was hindered by Old Church clergy and humanist intellectuals alike, neither of whom possessed spiritual authority. The laity alone held spiritual authority, having once passed through that poverty of spirit that opened the door to God's direct teaching. Such elect were set against corrupt ecclesiastical and worldly authorities, whose choice was either to accept the new order or to face a "justified uprising." Müntzer thus merged his theological views with social experience and preached that society itself

had to change at the root or be changed. This combination of mysticism and political radicalism appealed to many members of the lower orders who, having seen the authority of the Church overthrown, were prepared to hear arguments that the worldly authority that so closely governed their lives should legitimately be overthrown as well.

One can scarcely imagine doctrines more inimical to the interests of the Nuremberg City Council than those of Carlstadt and Müntzer. It is natural, therefore, that the Council was alert to their influence. Censorship ordinances already in place forbade any publication without the Council's prior consent. Yet, pamphlets by both Carlstadt and Müntzer were published clandestinely in Nuremberg. When in 1525 some people read a Carlstadt pamphlet aloud in the church of St. Lorenz during one of Osiander's sermons in hopes of kindling a disputation, the alarmed Council investigated.

The Council identified a schoolmaster, Hans Denck, as a ringleader of Nuremberg's radicals and expelled him from the city along with three formcutters, students of Dürer, who admitted under questioning that they did not believe in Scripture, had no use for the Sacrament of the Altar or baptism, and recognized no authority over them but God alone. It was this last admission the Council likely found it impossible to accept.

But it was not just those inside the walls who had been listening to Carlstadt and Müntzer. Peasants had gotten the word too, and began demanding substantial changes in their condition. As early as June 1524, peasants in the vicinity of Nuremberg burned their

tithe grain in the fields in protest against payment. The tithes, said a peasant delegation that was soon taken into custody, were no longer called for as the masses and requiems for which they had been collected were, after all, no longer being practiced. (This protest coincided with the promulgation of the provosts' new church order, described above.) However the Council felt about this position and the peasants who had presented it, it was persuaded by a vocal mob of artisans gathered outside the town hall to release the peasant delegation and to modify its demands for excise and other taxes. (The Council in turn demanded that preachers henceforth make clear to listeners that evangelism was about brotherly love, not taxes.)

This incident was but one precursor to the more serious and widespread peasant revolts of 1525. Upper Swabian peasants advanced Twelve Articles early that year, "a list of grievances, a reform program, and a political manifesto all in one."⁶¹ The Articles, which called for the abolition of certain tithes, of prohibitions against hunting and fishing, and of serfdom itself, appeared across southern Germany in twenty-five editions in the space of two months.

Of course, there was a genuine question of social justice. Even after the peasant's revolt of 1525 had reach its bloody conclusion, patrician Kaspar Nützel wrote Duke Albert of Prussia,

No one with any reason would be able to deny how unreasonably, unchristianly, indeed, how excessively the authorities have torn out the

⁶¹ Blicke, *The Revolution of 1525*, 18.

hair of their subjects, whom they should succor, defend, and rule, rather than fleece them.⁶²

Nützel was probably not alone in his sympathies. Yet, any who embraced the peasants' cause would automatically be counted as an opponent of the existing feudal and political order. Nuremberg's fellow members of the Swabian League were preparing to crush the peasant revolt and expected Nuremberg's military support in the field. The Council was naturally reluctant to become an enemy of its fellow league members. Besides, if peasants were successful they might make a common cause with Nuremberg's artisans, as it appeared they nearly had in 1524. With the two united in a radical social agenda, matters might well spiral permanently out of the Council's control. The Council again found itself in the middle, trying to prevent an alliance between peasant and artisan and trying to avoid taking sides in a revolt whose outcome was uncertain.

In the event, the Council managed to walk its tightrope successfully, refusing to join the 1525 revolt when invited to do so, but easing tax burdens on peasants even as it dutifully sent its armed contingent to join the Swabian League. Nuremberg negotiators were instrumental in bringing about truces and shielding some peaceful peasants from unjust retribution, but they could not prevent the brutal suppression that so many territorial nobles engaged in when the revolt was finally crushed.

On the peasant revolt, the cloister issue, and the pace of the Reformation itself, the residents of Nuremberg and its immediate territory held an assortment of views

⁶² Quoted in Tom Scott and Robert Scribner, *The German Peasant's War, a History in Documents* (London: Humanities Press, 1991), 321, 322.

informed by their spiritual orientation and resolve, their social position, their economic interests, and the influence of their fellows. As we have seen, the Reformation combined and recombined such factors in new ways. One can sympathize with the City Council in its ongoing struggle to maintain internal order and civic independence at a time of such swift, unprecedented, and unpredictable change.

Not the least of the Council's considerations under these circumstances was the disposition of the common man, both inside the walls and immediately outside. It is evident that the Council worried about the state of its citizens. It noted often enough the possibility of insurrection. In a walled city of 25,000 that terrible possibility was probably never far from the Council's thoughts. Witness, for example, the hundreds of spooled heavy chains the Council had for generations kept in locked cases at every strategic street corner in Nuremberg. The chains were regularly oiled and prepared for deployment by street captains to block thoroughfares if necessary. The chains would slow the movement of mobs and enable forces of the Council to regain control in the event of riot. Such preparations suggest a perception that the Nuremberg "public" might come together and act in a concerted way based on commonly held views.

If it is true that "Dreams of truth, justice, freedom could be launched on a flood of cheap paper and smudgy print," as Matheson claims, then the question of "public opinion" naturally arises in the context of Reformation-era print.⁶³ Having briefly described the setting within which Nuremberg's printers worked during a few crucial

⁶³ Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 21.

Chapter 2

Public Opinion in Reformation Nuremberg

Nuremberg's military captains introduce their account of the 1524 tithe revolt with the observation that the peasants wanted no more tithes and taxes; and that the citizens and artisans of the city supported them, followed them, expressed the desire to help them, and were outraged against the Council and its members.¹ It is a description that paints a persuasive picture of an aroused and single-minded urban public. Indeed, a worried Council felt moved to take several artisans into custody on that occasion and question them about the support their respective city crafts were giving the peasants. The Council's subsequent concessions on taxes may arguably be seen in the context of a public that was politically active and that was acting in a concerted way on its beliefs—that is, in the context of public opinion. This chapter will explore the question of public opinion—how the term came into being, how it has been applied by historians and sociologists, and whether and in what sense it may be applied to Reformation-era Nuremberg.

“Public opinion” is a term rendered in German as *öffentliche Meinung* or, in a more generalized sense, as *Öffentlichkeit*.² One will not find these terms in the lexicons of Reformation-era Germany. To be sure, the components, *öffentlich* (public) and *Meinung* (meaning, or opinion), are each cited repeatedly in the *Dictionarum*

¹ Schmidt, *Reichsstädte, Reich und Reformation*, 154.

² *Öffentlichkeit* is also translatable as “public,” “publicity,” “public nature,” or “public sphere.”

germanicolatinum novem (1561), but at no point do they appear together there or in other German-Latin dictionaries of the era.³ Nor are they found together in other European languages of that time. One must advance to at least 1741 to find the first use of phrases like “opinion of the people” and “opinion of the public” in English, and to 1744 before Rousseau makes first use of the phrase *l’opinion publique* in France.⁴

Price reports that the French are most widely viewed as inventors and popularizers of public opinion as a concept, with French writers making extensive use of the term by the 1780s. Jacques Necker, one-time finance minister to Louis XVI, felt moved to remark from his retirement in 1792, “Only fools, pure theorists, or apprentices fail to take public opinion into account,” making it clear that the term possessed for him a political, not merely a social meaning.⁵

German usage of the term appears to derive from the French. Habermas reports that “the noun *Öffentlichkeit* was formed from the older adjective *öffentlich* during the eighteenth century, in analogy to ‘*publicité*’ and ‘*publicity*’ . . . Criticism . . . was presented in the form of *öffentliche Meinung* . . . formed in the second half of the eighteenth century in analogy to *opinion publique*.” He adds, “If the public sphere did not require a name of its own before this period, we may assume that this sphere first

³ Josua Maler, *Die Teutsch Sprach: dictionarium germanicolatinum novum. Mit einer Einführung von Gilbert de Smet*. (1561; reprint, Hildesheim, New York: G. Olms, 1971); Jonathan West, *Early New High German - English Dictionary*. [updated 25 April 2000]; available at the web site <http://www.staff.ncl.ac.uk/jon.west/enhg_dic_home.htm>

⁴ Vincent Price, *Public Opinion* (Newbury Park, London: Sage Publications, 1992), 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

emerged and took on its function only at that time, at least in Germany.”⁶ It is an analysis that raises questions about the formation of public opinion in any earlier era.

Public opinion, Habermas maintains, first arose from the reasoned discourse of a politically functional “public sphere” that took form in eighteenth-century Europe with the development of capitalism and the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie. The public sphere, described by him in his influential work *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, or *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962/tr.1989), is the socio-political realm that grew to exist between the domain of public authority and the private realm of the home. It is within this sphere, Habermas says, that debate came to be held, criticism expressed, and public opinion formed in a liberal, democratic society.

Habermas cites several conditions necessary for the formation of the public sphere. They include “private space” within which political self-understanding can form; a “medium” (e.g., coffeehouse, salon, club) in which political thought may safely develop; “universal access” such that no citizen is excluded from political discourse; a “rational principle” governing the discourse; and an “instrument” (e.g., a parliament) through which resulting political demands can be focused. Habermas maintains that these conditions first came together in eighteenth-century England and did not appear in finished form in Germany until early in the nineteenth century.

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989), 2, 3, 26.

Matheson, however, argues that our thinking about the genesis of public opinion “can no longer be contained within the categories set by Habermas.”⁷ Public opinion, as he points out, is a subjective term. It has undergone a number of interpretations over the years, only one of which is the “classic” Enlightenment view that it emerged in the eighteenth century.

Balzer, for example, argues that all of Habermas’ criteria were essentially satisfied during the sixteenth century.⁸ Religion became a private affair during the Reformation, as Habermas himself concedes, making for a secure “interior” space where political self-awareness might form.⁹ Cultic associations, including meistersingers and guilds in most cities, not to mention sodalities, served the function of a “medium” for discussion, as did informal meetings in private homes, spinning bees, or private dinners. Luther’s proclamation of a priesthood of all believers served the end of universal access, and his principle of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), which formed the basis of so many pamphlets printed in Nuremberg, fulfilled the criterion of a universal principle governing discourse.¹⁰ The criterion of an “instrument” of public opinion is not as clearly fulfilled by the imperial diet, since the diet was more an assembly of estates than a parliamentary institution. Yet, as Matheson suggests, there were also village convocations and civic colloquies that “acted as sounding boards for ideas.”¹¹ Moreover, the councils that

⁷ Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 30

⁸ Bernd Balzer, *Bürgerliche Reformationspropaganda, Die Flugschriften des Hans Sachs in den Jahren 1523-1525* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1973), 11, 12.

⁹ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 83, n. 62.

¹⁰ Chrisman notes the care with which some pamphleteers justified each and every point they made by way of a scriptural reference, sometimes to the point of tediousness. Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 162, 163.

¹¹ Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 29, 30, 56.

governed Germany's towns and cities often included guild representatives who could have brought the common view with them, making councils sites of discourse. A politically functional public sphere of the sort described by Habermas was present, then, during the early Reformation, or so Balzer concludes.¹²

Ukena is among those who object to Balzer's argument, however, as a misguided attempt to force Habermasian theory onto sixteenth-century conditions. Analogies between the "publics" of sixteenth- and eighteenth-century Germany ignore the "complete historical discontinuity" between those times.¹³ Haude cites other historians, including Wohlfeil, Hölscher, and Giel, who have "been careful to distinguish 'the public' of the Reformation (*reformatorische Öffentlichkeit*) from that of the late eighteenth century (*bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit*)."¹⁴

Wohlfeil articulates one important distinction between the two. "Bourgeois," he says, "in the Habermasian sense is not the same category as 'bourgeois' during the Reformation era."¹⁵ The burgher society of sixteenth-century Nuremberg was not stratified in the way eighteenth-century urban society later became, with craftsmen and shopkeepers suffering downward mobility as great merchants, bankers, entrepreneurs and

¹² Balzer, *Bürgerliche Reformationspropaganda*, 13.

¹³ Peter Ukena, "Tagesschrifttum und Öffentlichkeit im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert in Deutschland," in *Presse und Geschichte, Beiträge zur historischen Kommunikationsforschung* (München: Verlag Dokumentation, 1977), 35.

¹⁴ Sigrun Haude, *In the Shadow of "Savage Wolves": Anabaptist Münster and the German Reformation during the 1530s* (Boston: Humanities Press, 2000), 20, n. 15.

¹⁵ Ranier Wohlfiel, "Reformatorische Öffentlichkeit" in *Literatur und Laienbildung im Spätmittelalter und in der Reformationszeit* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1981), 45.

manufacturers grew into an influential bourgeois “who . . . were not really ‘burghers’ in the traditional sense.”¹⁶ Thus, the theoretical view of a sixteenth-century public sphere is not easily conveyed from Habermas’s analysis, based firmly as it is on eighteenth-century class and economic interests.

One’s mental picture of a “Reformation public” (*reformatatorische Öffentlichkeit*), argues Wohlfeil, must be conditioned instead by the media system of the time. Wohlfeil uses “public” here not as a substantive term, but as an adjectival one, denoting “clear,” “obvious,” and “well-known.” The point of departure for the Reformation public, he says, was the preaching of God’s Word in the language of its hearers. No other medium was comparable to the sermon in its opinion-forming effect. Print, of course, significantly widened the sermon’s scope, publicizing it and enabling many to “hear” a sermon that had been preached at some other time or place. At least seventeen pamphlets printed in Nuremberg in 1524/25 reproduce sermons, including six from Luther, three from Osiander, and three from Diepold Peringer, the popular “peasant of Wöhrd,” who is described in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Ukena uses a similar definition of “public” borrowed from Otto Groth: “Public is what is accessible to everyone, what everyone uses, or rather, what *can* be taken note of” [original emphasis].¹⁷ One of Ukena’s arguments is that the transition away from Latin to German was, next to printing itself, a key requirement for the formation of a “public,”

¹⁶ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 23.

¹⁷ *Öffentlich ist, was jedermann zugänglich ist, was von jedermann benutzt bzw. zu Kenntnis genommen werden kann.* Balzer, “Tagesschrifttum und Öffentlichkeit,” 36.

and that it was consciously performed with that end mind. He cites Johann Eberlin von Günzburg, a critic of the Franciscan order, who titled one pamphlet:

Why one transfers Erasmus of Rotterdam to the German language. Why Doctor Luther and Sir Ulrich von Hutten write in German. How useful and necessary it is that such things be available for the common man.¹⁸

German print joined already complex processes of public communication including “popular festivals, irregular assemblies, spontaneous demonstrations, anonymous pasquinades, popular ballads and the forms of oral culture, above all . . . rumour.”¹⁹ The inhabitants of Reformation Nuremberg could thus have reached commonly held viewpoints through a variety of interactive means. And the “outcome of the interaction of all forms of communication,” says Wohlfeil, “was the Reformation public.”²⁰

David Zaret, a sociologist whose field of research includes the development of the public sphere in seventeenth-century England, joins Wohlfeil and Ukena when he suggests that the advent of public opinion had less to do with economics and social class, the categories on which Habermas bases his analysis, than on print culture. Habermas, of course, acknowledges the importance of print as the “decisive mark” of the public sphere.²¹ But Zaret asserts that the early-modern press did not serve as an extension of

¹⁸ *Warumb man herr Erasmus von Roterodam in Teütscher sprach transferiert. Warumb doctor Luther vnd herr Vlrich von Hutten teütsch schriben. Wie nutz vnd not es sy, das sollich ding dem gemeinen man für komm.* quoted in Ukena, “Tagesshrifttum und Öffentlichkeit,” 37.

¹⁹ Robert Scribner, “Oral Culture and the Diffusion of Reformation Ideas” in *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London and Ronceverte, The Hambledon Press, 1987), 54.

²⁰ Wohlfeil, “Reformatörisehe Öffentlichkeit,” 48.

²¹ David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000), 34.

reasoned debate, as Habermas would have it, but as “very nearly the opposite.”²² The press, he argues, created an atmosphere of “commerce and controversy,” prompting printers to create texts for which popular demand existed. The content of that communication “became oriented to the constitution and invocation of public opinion.”²³ Wohlfeil argues along very similar lines when he claims that Reformation-era print, when it was read aloud, was intended neither to transfer knowledge nor to communicate information, but chiefly to form opinion.²⁴

There appears to be growing agreement among scholars of both history and sociology, then, that public opinion existed before the eighteenth century and that print was a key element in its formation.²⁵ The question remains, however, how public opinion manifested itself in sixteenth-century society and how it was thought of at a time when, as Habermas correctly points out, there was no term to describe it.

Whether or not it had earned a distinctive name, the collective will of the common man was apparently a recognized phenomenon in early modern Europe. The good will of the people was cited by Machiavelli in *The Prince* (1515) as a significant factor in the successful running of a sixteenth-century state.²⁶ Though Machiavelli does not describe what he means by “the people” in modern social terms, he does assure the reader that the

²² Ibid., 35.

²³ Ibid., 13.

²⁴ Wohlfeil, “Reformatorische Öffentlichkeit,” 42.

²⁵ Cf. Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, esp. chap. 2; Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture*; Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*; Eisenstein, *Printing Press as Agent*, esp. chap. 4.

²⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (Middlesex: Penguin, 1961), 102-5.

good will of a prince's "citizens" or "subjects" is the best defense against conspiracy. Machiavelli praises parliaments as a useful means of keeping in check "the ambition and insolence of the powerful."²⁷ He goes even further in his *Discourses*, suggesting that the public can often deliver better judgment than that of princes and nobles on issues it is capable of understanding. And further still,

. . . if princes show themselves superior in the making of laws, and in the forming of civil institutions and new statutes and ordinances, the people are superior in maintaining those institutions, laws, and ordinances, which certainly places them on a par with those who established them.²⁸

Thus, Machiavelli represents the public as a body able to act, or be used, as a force for balance and stability. But the public could also act as a dynamic and decisive force. The cities of early modern Europe offer some dramatic examples of an urban public's ability to tip the political scales at crucial moments.

A public more favorably oriented toward his plans, for example, would have served England's John Dudley, the duke of Northumberland, very well in 1553. When Dudley arranged that year for the Protestant Lady Jane Grey to be proclaimed queen in an attempt to divert the succession from the Catholic Mary, "few or none [of the people] sayd God save hare."²⁹ But when Mary arrived in London nine days later,

The bonefires weare without nomber, and what with showtynge and crienge of the people, and ringinge of the belles, theare could no one heare

²⁷ Ibid., 105.

²⁸ quoted in M. Judd Harmon, *Political Thought from Plato to the Present* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 168.

²⁹ The passages of the Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London, (MS. Cotton. Vitellius, F. XII.)

almost what another sayd, besides banketyngs and synging in the streete
for joye.³⁰

Whatever her faith, the London public considered Mary rightful heir to the throne of England. The attempt to divert the succession was doomed without their support—as was Dudley, after his failure.

Diefendorf argues that the Catholic commoners of sixteenth-century Paris had more to do with the tragedy of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572) than any of their social superiors. Influenced by a belief in communal piety, the Paris Catholic public blamed Huguenots for economic distress or visits by the plague. Hotheaded Catholic mobs, influenced by fiery preachers, made it impossible for magistrates or officers of the King to govern the city with even-handed regard for its two confessions, even for the sake of civil order. Paris magistrates were "constantly reminded of the fragility of civil society and made keenly aware of the narrowing limits of their effective authority."³¹ Noble Catholic leaders (i.e., the Duke of Guise), Diefendorf argues, did not assume leadership of the mobs, but were selected for leadership by them. The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre is thus explicable as a desire of the Parisian public to protect and defend the existing religious order at a time when royal and municipal officers seemed too ready to compromise it.

³⁰ Ralph Starkey's Collections, (MS. Harl. 353, p. 139 et. seq.)

³¹ Barbara Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 172.

In neither of these cases was the urban public roused over a matter that stood to affect it directly, like the rising price of bread or a new tax. Rather, the public roused itself over a social or political issue that stood to affect it indirectly, whether it was a principle of succession or the perceived threat to collective piety presented by the presence of Huguenots.³² These spontaneous and dramatic demonstrations were surely possible only in the context of a consensus reached through a communication matrix of the sort envisioned by Wohlfel and Zaret. Public opinion in the German cities of the early Reformation was likely formed in a similar way. Certainly, there is evidence that the ruling bodies of those cities anticipated similarly decisive public demonstrations.

Repeated appeals by German princes and town councils to emperor and pope that they dared not enforce anti-Lutheran directives lest they risk tumult and revolt stand witness to the presence of public opinion in Reformation Germany. As Chapter 1 described, the City Council of Nuremberg made those very pleas before the Imperial Council of Regency and the bishop of Bamberg in June 1524 to help explain why it permitted the new evangelical church order to stand. Other town councils throughout Germany found themselves at odds with their citizens for similar reasons.

Scribner points out several cases where a community took charge of its own religious order without so much as consulting its town council or the traditional ecclesiastical authorities. In 1521, for example, the popular preaching of the Dominican

³² Catherine de Medici, mother of Charles IX, may well have felt directly threatened by the presence of so many Huguenots in Paris on that occasion, believing they were preparing to grab the French throne. But Diefendorf argues that the Paris public acted on a pent-up desire to rid the city of the Huguenot presence and carried matters far beyond any official wishes.

Jakob Strauss at Hall led to his appointment as preacher in St. Nicholas. When the bishop of Brixen tried to expel him, “a number of citizens, sometimes as many as forty at a time, appointed themselves an informal bodyguard to forestall any direct episcopal action.”³³ In 1524 an attempt by Straslund’s Catholic mayor to banish Christian Ketelhodt, a popular evangelical preacher, “provoked a deputation of a hundred citizens, supported by several evangelical town councilors, who proclaimed that they were willing to give their lives to keep the preacher in the city.”³⁴ In June 1526 Hamburg’s Town Council ordered its first evangelical preacher, Johann Zegenhagen, to leave town within three days but relented when confronted by a delegation of forty citizens “chosen from an assembly of four thousand.”³⁵ The Council balked when the same man was elected as parish priest in September, but backed down again when faced with assemblies and deputations from its citizens. “No urban government of the sixteenth century,” says Scribner, “was happy about such challenges to its authority.”³⁶

Again, it is important to recognize that such challenges did not take place in a vacuum, even though they appear intermittently in Town Council minutes. Concerted action on the part of urban citizens was surely preceded by heated and extensive discussions that led to a consensus of opinion, enabling immediate response when circumstances dictated. Otherwise, such strong public displays would have been hard to organize and mount. Town Councils must have been conscious that public

³³ Robert Scribner, “Preachers and People in the German Towns,” in *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: Hambledon Press, 1987), 133.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 139

³⁶ Ibid..

demonstrations suggested the presence of sustained opinion and been worried that such challenges, once mounted, might spiral into insurrection.

Urban governments did not always come away the worse for the challenge, but those that prevailed had to exert significant energy to do so. Scribner points out that Cologne, the largest of the imperial cities, managed to remain staunchly Catholic despite a communal disturbance in 1525 that threatened to introduce Lutheranism. That city, dominated by its orthodox university faculty as well as its City Council, was hostile from the beginning to even a humanist presence within its walls, let alone a Lutheran one. It exercised stricter, more vigilant censorship than other such cities and saw to it that no Reformation preaching gained a foothold in any parish community. "Loose talk in inns, or even at home before neighbours, was sufficient reason for an invitation to explain one's view to police officials."³⁷ Life in Cologne was closely controlled by *Gaffels*, guild-based political corporations to which all residents of Cologne were obliged to belong. Cologne's governing elite kept a close watch on its citizens through the *Gaffels* and so were able to stamp out sparks of Reformation wherever they appeared. The attempt by an evangelical faction to seize Cologne's gates in 1525 was forestalled by seizure of the ringleaders on information received from their *Gaffel* masters.

³⁷ Robert Scribner, "Why was there no Reformation in Cologne?" in *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: Hambledon Press, 1987), 235.

“Public opinion,” claims Zukin, “can perhaps best be thought of as those opinions held by private persons which government finds it prudent to heed.”³⁸ If we substitute the words “common man” for “private person” and think of the common man as a member of a crowd, we may begin to approach the way public opinion was thought of in early modern times. Shakespeare’s crowds in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, manipulated as they are by rhetoric, may not be exemplars of good judgment, but they are credible dramatic forces. The metaphor of a street crowd for the public in those works is clear enough, even though both plays are situated in ancient times and thus less likely to be identified by a paying audience as a mirror of themselves. A good prince was well advised to know his people and keep himself informed, as did Shakespeare’s Henry V, moving in disguise among his men on the eve of Agincourt. Nor was it only stage rulers who believed it vital to keep in touch with the people. In a letter of instruction written May 4, 1543, Charles V urged his son, Philip, to “find time to go among and talk with the people”.³⁹

Artists like Shakespeare surely succeeded not only because they recognized such conventions, but also because they were attuned to the audiences of their times. A display of the people’s will was evidently a possibility Shakespearean audiences of all social strata could accept. It is interesting, then, that Shakespeare, writing in the late sixteenth

³⁸ Cliff Zukin, “Comment on Davis: Yes, but . . . Public Opinion is a Top-Down Process,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56 (1992): 314. Zukin holds a doctorate in Political Science and serves as director of the Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers poll and an election consultant for NBC News.

³⁹ Henry Kamen, *Philip of Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 11.

and early seventeenth centuries, represented “the control of public opinion as pushing and pulling a malleable, but dangerous, mass.”⁴⁰

Such a display of public opinion, as the examples above suggest, was an accepted and observable fact in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Its lack of a name does not indicate that it did not exist, only that it was an innovation for which a term had not yet been coined.⁴¹ The distinction between a “crowd” and a “public” is often not a great one, even in modern times, and it is not surprising that the distinction went unrecognized in the sixteenth century. The “Reformation public” was formed not merely by the ability of a group to feel and empathize, but also by the informed discussion of issues. “It was the face-to-face encounters which really shifted hearts and minds,” says Matheson, “the civic talk-ins, endless discussions in inns and mills, monasteries and student lodgings”⁴² The eventual alignment of less-interested (but not *uninterested*) members of the public ultimately determined which among competing views would predominate.⁴³ At some point, contrary, minority points of view would likely have become difficult to express without risking disapproval, ostracism, or even attack. Witness the bodyguards the Nuremberg City Council was obliged to provide the Catholic monks on their way to and from the colloquy of 1525. When such minority voices finally fell silent, then public opinion, forged in the community of discourse, may be said to have triumphed.

⁴⁰ Kurt W. Back, “Metaphors for Public Opinion in Literature,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 52 (1988): 284. Back was James B. Duke Professor of Sociology at Duke University.

⁴¹ Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture*, 21.

⁴² Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 36.

⁴³ Price, *Public Opinion*, 27.

Given that face-to-face oral transmission was the primary means of communication for most people in the sixteenth century, it is not surprising that so many point to discussion as the basis for the formation of public opinion in cities like Reformation Nuremberg.⁴⁴ But such discussion was influenced and fostered by the circulation of printed texts. The agency of print thus figures as a significant component in the formation of public opinion, which in turn raises questions of literacy. How many could read the pamphlets that circulated, and how important was literacy to their reception?

While literacy rates are hard to estimate and have rarely been determined for any particular location, most historians accept the general research of Rolf Engelsing, who suggests that only five percent of the German-speaking population was literate at the outset of the sixteenth century, with the figure rising up to thirty percent in the cities.⁴⁵ Nuremberg was certainly among the most literate cities in the Empire, with four Latin schools to its credit and as many as 4,000 pupils at a time, a full sixteen percent of its total population within the walls, attending those and the less formal German schools in 1487.⁴⁶ Scribner reports that Nuremberg sent students to the university “in numbers vastly disproportional to its population.”⁴⁷ Even a shoemaker like Nuremberg’s Hans Sachs could boast eight years of Latin school, and the texts provided to students in such

⁴⁴ Cf. Scribner, “Oral Culture and Reformation Ideas,” 50, 51; Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 36, 37.

⁴⁵ See Köhler, “Erste Schritte,” 250; Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 37; Matheson, *Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 36; Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Malden: Blackwell, 1996), 36; Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 2. Schwitalla, by contrast, cites Erich Schön, who estimates urban literacy at only five percent and overall literacy at as little as one percent. Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 27.

⁴⁶ Scribner, “Heterodoxy, literacy, and print,” 258.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 259.

schools provided steady work for several of Nuremberg's printers, as Chapter 5 will describe in greater detail. Yet, even at that, the Reformation would have been a minority event had it only reached the literate.

As we have seen, the agency of print did not work alone, but as part of a complex oral/visual culture. The authors of early Reformation pamphlets expected their works to be read aloud, and their contents to be diffused orally. Authors even encouraged it, exhorting people to read or be read to (*Lies oder laß dir lesen*).⁴⁸ Some pamphlets facilitated reading aloud by making the last word on one page identical to the first word on the following page as a visual aid. It was a device that allowed those reading aloud to turn pages without a vocal pause.⁴⁹ In an urban setting, particularly a densely populated one like Nuremberg, word could spread quickly through vocal reading and repetition of what had been read.

Scribner believes the pamphlet sometimes acted as a stimulus, but more often served in the role of a catalyst or an aid to discussion.⁵⁰ Matheson calls pamphlets "information packs . . . [that] equipped supporters to pursue effective campaigns, and of course lent them moral support."⁵¹ From sermons a listener could learn figures of speech,

⁴⁸ Monika Rössing-Hager, "Wie stark findet der nicht-lesekundige Rezipient Berücksichtigung in den Flugschriften?" in Hans-Joachim Köhler, ed., *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 77.

⁴⁹ While not used on every page, this device is found in Diebold Peringer, *Ein Sermon von der Abgötterey/durch den Pawern/der weder schreyben noch lesen kan/gepredigt zu Kitzing um Franckenland auff unsers herren Fronleychnams tag* (Nuremberg: Hans Hergot, 1524) Fiche 1493/#3922.

⁵⁰ Robert W. Scribner, "Flugblatt und Analphabetentum. Wie kam der gemeine Mann zu reformatorischen Ideen?" in Hans-Joachim Köhler, ed., *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 69.

⁵¹ Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 32, 33.

examples, rich imagery, and how to anticipate objections. As we have seen, at least seventeen sermons were printed in Nuremberg in 1524/25. Pamphlet dialogues taught argumentative strategies useful for everyday disputes, showing how those who knew their Bible could back an opponent into a corner. At least eleven such dialogues were printed in Nuremberg in 1524/25.⁵² Pamphlets equipped readers and listeners to defend the priesthood of all believers even as they guided them on the path of belief.

Pamphlets might also inflame the reader or listener, for the language was sometimes strong and the appeal deliberately emotional. If that seems at odds with Habermas' characterization of print as a medium of reasoned discourse, Zaret's observation that print more often served the purpose of "commerce and controversy" should be recalled (see above, p. 45). Rational discourse may well have been subverted at times by pamphlet rhetoric, but that does not invalidate the pamphlet as a contributor to the debates that formed public opinion. As Blumer observes, "public debate may range from 'highly emotional and prejudiced' to 'highly intelligent and thoughtful.'"⁵³ The important point is that opinion was formed in a matrix of accelerating and expanding communication with print as a key component.

As Back points out, public opinion is "an outcome of the society in which it is stated."⁵⁴ Modern societies often treat public opinion as the sum of individual opinions, as a matter of statistical analysis. Some even complain that we have now arrived at

⁵² Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 63.

⁵³ Quoted in Price, *Public Opinion*, 27.

⁵⁴ Back, "Metaphors for Public Opinion," 278.

“governance by polls, insurance by actuarial tables, newspapers by readership surveys, and just about everything else by focus groups.”⁵⁵ At the opposite pole lies a concept of public opinion as a social whole, a “joint expression by all members of the society.”⁵⁶ Reformation Nuremberg probably falls between these poles, with its “public” comprising both actors and spectators, and with membership in each shifting with the nature and perceived importance of the issue.

Public opinion in Reformation Nuremberg may not be measurable by modern standards, but signs of it can be inferred through the commentary of observers and actions the Council was obliged to take for the sake of order or diplomacy. About a month before the imperial diet convened in Nuremberg in the fall of 1522, for example, the Council felt obliged to repeat earlier warnings against the production and sale of Luther’s pictures or writings. It sent two officers and a servant into the marketplace on a weekly basis to assure that no such texts were being sold or distributed. Yet, the diet had not been meeting a month when, on December 6, the Council was called to account by imperial officers who complained that “Lutheran diatribes” were indeed being sold. The Council obligingly issued a sharper warning and even stipulated that *anti*-Lutheran texts *could* be published—an easy move, says Englehardt, since the Council knew that there was not a printer in Nuremberg at that time who would print anything negative about Martin Luther.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ “With the Sniper, TV Profilers Missed Their Mark,” *Washington Post*, 25 October, 2002, online edition.

⁵⁶ Back, “Metaphors for Public Opinion,” 281.

⁵⁷ Vogler, *Nürnberg, 1524/25*, 48, n. 11.

Clearly, there was a demanding market for Lutheran texts in the city of Nuremberg, a market that threats and penalties could not extinguish. And just as clearly, there was virtually no market for anti-Lutheran texts. It is persuasive evidence that public opinion had by then aligned itself with the Lutheran side, as Christoph Sheurl, legal advisor to the Council, was reporting as early as 1520 (see above, p. 23).

After the imperial diet adjourned in February 1523, anti-clerical activity increased. The Council, mindful of imperial criticism, issued repeated warnings against derisive papal images and songs, but was still obliged to imprison a number of women who sold satirical or critical printed images of the pope. It also imprisoned several city servants guilty of singing a certain lewd song about monks, priests and nuns to the tune of “Christ has arisen.” The fact that these transgressions were punished by the Council and not bystanders suggests that this was behavior one could “get away with” socially, that it lay within the safe zone of public opinion, if not of the Council’s diplomatic concerns.

On January 3, 1523, Francesco Chierigati, the papal nuncio, addressed the imperial diet meeting in Nuremberg to demand that the city’s heretical, Lutheran preachers be imprisoned and punished. That same day, a Saxon delegate wrote home to his superiors, “There is a great murmuring in the city. I would not advise that anyone is going to be imprisoned.”⁵⁸ The delegate reports no rioting, nor even any gatherings. But the city, apparently, had a “voice” of sorts that even a visitor could pick up on. Subtle

⁵⁸ “Ist deshalb in der statt ein groß murmeln. Will nicht raten, das man einen gefänglich anneme.” Ibid., 48.

though it was, it was probably a “voice” the City Council heard with even sharper ears.

The role of the pamphlet as both a seed and a fertilizer for the community of discourse that led to this detectable “public opinion” is hard to overestimate, even though as Scribner says, it played but one part in the larger musical score.⁵⁹ Print, as Chapter 3 will describe in greater detail, joined and augmented existing processes of communication including sermons, ballads, and discussions held at popular festivals, taverns, or private dinners. Thus, the pamphlet must now fall under closer scrutiny, along with the craft of print through which pamphlets were created and distributed.

⁵⁹ Scribner, “Flugblatt und Analphabetentum,” 75.

Chapter 3

Pamphlets and Communication in Early Reformation Nuremberg

“Wherever it has flourished,” says Matheson, “pamphlet literature has always indicated a struggle for the mind.”¹ More than eleven million pamphlets were printed in Central Europe between 1520 and 1526, approximately twenty for every literate in the Empire, suggesting how intense was the struggle for the German mind during the early years of the Reformation.²

No region of Europe reached such a level of pamphlet production again before the nineteenth century.³ Nothing in the sixteenth century even approached it. Pamphlet production did not gain momentum in France before the 1540s with the Calvinist movement. It doubled under Charles IX (1560-74) and quadrupled under Henry III (1574-89),⁴ but even during the decade of highest political tension, from 1585 to 1594, the great publishing center of Paris produced only about 870 pamphlets.⁵ In 1524 alone, some 2,400 were printed in Germany.⁶ There was little pamphlet production in Spain despite “at least eighteen locations” where Spanish presses operated.⁷ Elton points to a pamphlet campaign supporting the doctrine of royal supremacy conducted by England’s

¹ Peter Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 6.

² Hans-Joachim Köhler, “Erste Schritte zu einem Meinungsprofil der frühen Reformationszeit” in *Martin Luther: Probleme seiner Zeit*, ed. Dieter Stievermann (Stuttgart: Volker Press, 1986), 250, 251.

³ Johannes Schwitalla, *Flugschrift* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999), 55, 56. Of course, the periodic press, which had its start in the seventeenth century, also began meeting the communication needs of European audiences in the meantime.

⁴ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 94.

⁵ Robert M. Kingdon, “Pamphlet Literature of the French Reformation” in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. Steven Ozment (St. Louis, Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 239.

⁶ Köhler, “Erste Schritte,” 250.

⁷ Richard G. Cole, “The Reformation Pamphlet and Communication Processes,” in *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit*, ed. Hans-Joachim Köhler (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982), 151.

Henry VIII in the 1530s as the first public relations campaign ever organized by a government, but no more than seventeen pamphlets have been identified in connection with that effort.⁸ Only about thirty were printed under Elizabeth in response to the Northern Rebellion.⁹ It was only in the German-speaking regions of Central Europe of the 1520s that print reached such explosive proportions, with the pamphlet its chief product.

This chapter will explore the pamphlet as a phenomenon of the early Reformation. It will attempt to define the term “pamphlet,” briefly describe motives from which its creators wrote, along with some of the techniques they used, and examine some ways pamphlet literature may be categorized. Finally, it will attempt to fit the pamphlet into the oral culture of early sixteenth-century Europe and suggest how it was received by readers and listeners in the complex of communications which, as we have seen, shaped public opinion.

The German-language pamphlet of the 1520s was well suited for its role of winning minds. It was accessible to readers, presented timely information and opinion, had a short, simple format, was relatively easy to produce, and at two pennies for a six-page pamphlet (only about an eighth of a day’s wages for Nuremberg laborer) it was within the grasp of most.¹⁰ It “could be easily transported by itinerant peddlers, hawked

⁸ G.R. Elton, *Policy and Police, the Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

⁹ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 93.

¹⁰ On pamphlet prices, see Johannes Schwitalla, *Flugschrift* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999), 31; on Nuremberg wages, see Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 205.

on the street corners and in taverns, advertised with jingles and intriguing title pages, and swiftly hidden in a pack or under clothing when the authorities made an appearance.”¹¹ It could also be read aloud at any gathering so that the illiterate might also be influenced by its message, and its woodcut illustrations served to engage and instruct the onlooker.

As scholars of the pamphlet have tried to define their subject, however, they have encountered difficulty. Pamphlets encompass a broad range of products, from simple, four-page vulgate quartos to book-length, illustrated Latin octavos. George Orwell once compared the difficulty of defining a pamphlet with that of defining a dog:

We all know a dog when we see one, or at least we think we do, but it is not easy to give a clear verbal definition, nor even to distinguish at sight between a dog and some kindred creature such as a wolf or a jackal.¹²

Various press products were distributed in the Germany of the 1520s, most of which were simply lumped together under the term *Büchlein*, or booklets. Modern terms of classification date from the late eighteenth century. First use of the German name for pamphlet, *Flugschrift*, literally “flying writing,” is uncertain, but the German musician/poet Christian F.D. Schubart was using it as early as 1788.¹³ The term plays metaphorically on the swiftness with which such small, light products could be

¹¹ Mark U. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994), 15.

¹² Quoted in Alexandra Halasz, *The Marketplace of Print, Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1997), 14.

¹³ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 2.

distributed. The association of “flying” with simple, unbound publications was made in the England of 1642, where it was noted that “Pamphlets, like wild geese, fly up and downe in flocks about the Countrey.”¹⁴ Sixteenth-century woodcuts sometimes depicted pamphlets as projectile weapons, whether arrows or cannons, aimed toward an enemy.¹⁵ In one or two cases, press products literally flew through the air toward their intended audience. In 1522 the Protestant German knight Franz von Sickingen threw broadsheets into the besieged city of Trier, and in 1534 Münsterites shot Anabaptist broadsheets and pamphlets over the walls in an attempt to win over the mercenaries besieging them.¹⁶

As Orwell noted, however, the difference between such light products of the press is sometimes small. The *Neue Zeitung*, for example, was a newssheet of multiple pages, about the same size and price as a pamphlet. It offered information on recent events, often with a moral admonition at the end. Pamphlets were purveyors of opinion, not of news, but they often included commentary on recent events. The distinction between the two could be a fine one, and some scholars, including Bach and Wilhelm, include news reports within the category of “pamphlet.”¹⁷

The *Flugblatt*, or broadsheet, was a single-page publication whose content was generally written in verse, was generally illustrated with woodcuts, and was generally sharply polemic. Pamphlets, by contrast, were multi-page publications more often

¹⁴ Ibid., 3

¹⁵ Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 33,

¹⁶ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 6

written in prose, occasionally illustrated, and occasionally polemic in tone.¹⁸ Yet, there was sufficient overlap between the two that the content of a broadsheet and a pamphlet could be identical. Schwitalla points out that the Edict of Worms appeared as both, a 10-page quarto and as a placard measuring 120 x 32 cm.¹⁹

Köhler, a leading scholar in the field, has examined no fewer than 170 definitions of “pamphlet” in an effort to sort matters out, and his concluding definition is the one most often found in secondary literature:

A pamphlet is an independent, non-recurring, unbound publication of more than one page whose purpose is to agitate (that is, move to action) and/or to propagandize (that is, influence an opinion) and which is addressed to the masses of the public at large.²⁰

Schwitalla notes that even these simple criteria have their exceptions. Luther’s Ninety-five Theses first appeared as a two-columned folio sheet, later as a four-paged quarto. By Köhler’s definition, the latter would have been a pamphlet, but the former not. Similarly, the mandates of the Emperor Maximilian were published once or twice a year between 1489 and 1513 and thus were recurring publications, which would disqualify them as pamphlets. Pamphlets were sometimes bound together like books to preserve them for future times, and Schwitalla reports that one cannot tell by looking whether such an edition was first conceived as a book or a pamphlet.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Quoted in Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 3.

²¹ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 5,6.

While these objections could be dismissed as quibbles, there remains a genuinely problematical criterion in Köhler's definition—that a pamphlet must be “addressed to the entire public” (*an die gesamte Öffentlichkeit wendet*). On this point, Köhler is adamant:

A letter sent from Martin Luther to a pre-determined community or to an isolated village (that is, to a particular social group) is, by itself, no pamphlet [even] if it appears in print and the other forms and functions are fulfilled. . . . On the other hand, the same writing should be regarded as a pamphlet if it is distributed (by Luther himself, a printer, bookseller, or any other communicator) to any recipient who wishes to acquire it—that is, to an anonymous, heterogeneous audience.²²

As Schwitalla points out, such a strict interpretation forces one to the logical conclusion that there was no such thing as a Latin pamphlet, since those able to read Latin comprised a particular social group, the educated. Yet, Köhler does not hesitate to include Latin pamphlets in his bibliography of early Reformation pamphlets.²³

Authors and printers knew that once released a pamphlet could make its way anywhere, but that does not mean they did not have a primary audience in mind. Hans Hillerbrand has noted that Luther used one voice for fellow theologians and the papacy, and another, pastoral voice when he addressed the common people.²⁴ If so, that would suggest Luther had different audiences in mind when he turned various pieces of his

²² Quoted in Johannes Schwitalla, *Deutsche Flugschriften, 1460-1525* (Tübingen: Niemayer, 1983), 16.

²³ Hans-Joachim Köhler, *Bibliographie der Flugschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Teil I, Bände 1-3 (Tübingen: Bibliotheca Academica Verlag, 1991). Numerous Latin pamphlets are listed, including thirteen editions authored by Bugenhagen and fifty-five by Erasmus.

²⁴ Hans. J. Hillerbrand, “The Antichrist in the Early German Reformation: Reflections on Theology and Propaganda,” in *Germania Illustrata, Essays on Early Modern Germany presented to Gerald Strauss*, Vol. XVIII (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1992), 16.

work over to the printer. Some pamphlet texts were apparently intended for particular local audiences. Reformed clergymen, when driven from the cities in which they had preached, sometimes wrote pamphlets that included specific references only members of their old congregations would be likely to understand.²⁵

Thomas Müntzer, the fiery former priest whose radical social views carried him so far from the mainstream of socially conservative Lutheran thought, created four different versions of his *Prague Protest* (1521), each of which was intended for a different audience, or so argues Friedrich de Boor.²⁶ Müntzer's surviving manuscripts include a Latin version that was moderate in tone; a long German version full of "rabid invective against the clergy [and] an unconcealed sympathy for the poor;" a short German version emphasizing "the immediate revelation of the divine spirit in humanity;" and an incomplete Czech translation of the longer German manuscript. Thus, Müntzer arguably aimed four "separate treatments . . . at specific circles of society."²⁷ If de Boor is correct, that would suggest that market segmentation, the division of a market into groups of buyers for whom special products are developed, is not the twentieth-century idea posited by modern economists, but rather a technique thought of as early as the sixteenth century in connection with the marketplace of print.²⁸

²⁵ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 33.

²⁶ Friedrich de Boor, "Zur Textgeschichte des Prager Manifests," in *Thomas Müntzer, Prager Manifest*, ed. Max Steinmetz (Leipzig: n.p., 1975), 13; cited in Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer, Apocalyptic Mystic and Revolutionary* trans. Jocelyn Jaquiery, ed. Peter Matheson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 75 n. 19.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 74, 75.

²⁸ Henry J. Claycamp and William F. Massey, "A Theory of Market Segmentation," *Journal of Marketing Research* 5 (1968): 388. The authors claim that the concept of market segmentation arose out of twentieth-century economic theory as a technique for maximizing profits for a homogeneous product in a

It is scarcely news that the sixteenth-century pamphlet market comprised discernable social segments, or that those segments were each addressed by various authors. Chrisman argues persuasively that lay authors generally appealed to the interests of those of their own rank and ignored the rest.²⁹ Thus, though Ulrich von Hutten, a leader of the Knight's Revolt of 1522, saw no fewer than seventy-four pamphlets through the press between 1512 and 1522, he inevitably cast his appeals to his countrymen in terms that accorded with his own worldview. He called, for example, for freedom from the grasp of Rome and restoration of the empire's greatness, a view that might have been broadly accepted in Germany. But he also "attacked the wealth and luxury of the great merchants, contrasting it to the ascetic life of the German noble, which hardly encouraged the cities to accept the leadership of the knights."³⁰ Such matters as the Reformation's effect on urban social relations, a theme pursued in the dialogue pamphlets of the Nuremberg cobbler, Hans Sachs, fell entirely beneath Hutten's notice. Writers like Hutten and Sachs brought particular concerns to their messages. Such writers aimed their work at segments of society with which they were familiar. The key to market segmentation would be to find an author—or a printer—who was conscious of more than one segment and advanced distinctive appeals to each, albeit with the single goal of gaining support for a particular viewpoint. This is what makes de Boor's observations about Müntzer so interesting.

heterogeneous market. Others have observed that special products were developed for different markets as early as the eighteenth century. See N. McKendrick, "Josiah Wedgwood, An Eighteenth Century Entrepreneur in Salesmanship and Marketing Techniques," *Economic History Review* 12 (1960): 408-33.

²⁹ Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 227-9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

The argument that market segmentation was a sixteenth-century practice is supported in part by Müntzer's own observation that one had to tailor one's rhetoric to the group being addressed. When trying to get through to the "*grob, tolpelisch und knuttelish volk*" (wooden, thick, foolish people), Müntzer said, one had to resort to oversimplification lest the audience suspect deviousness.³¹ Paul Speratus, an evangelical theologian and composer living in Wittenberg in 1524, similarly advocated simple, crude rhetoric as a means of reaching common folk and freeing them from their deference to traditional authorities.³²

As we will see in Chapter 5, there were printers whose output appears to have been aimed toward particular social segments, or at least toward particular social interests. That, accompanied by the rhetorical strategies described above, may argue for market segmentation, but there remains the question of the distribution of text to particular audiences, a question that is problematical at best. In the early sixteenth century, pamphlets circulated in manifold ways, the primary disseminators being roving booksellers, about 1,000 of whom worked between 1490 and 1550.³³ They sold pamphlets and other small items from drum-like boxes or vendor's trays, going wherever people gathered: taverns, village and city fairs, and the semi-yearly international trade fairs in Frankfurt and Leipzig. Other occasions for production and sales included the imperial diet, coronations, funerals, and disputations.³⁴ Though booksellers took to the roads in the late fifteenth century and still went from "town to

³¹ Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 50, 51, n. 40.

³² *Ibid.*, 51, n. 40.

³³ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

town, village to village, house to house” to push their wares,³⁵ pamphlets were more often sold locally. Old women and young lads were sometimes employed to distribute politically sensitive pamphlets on the streets on the theory that if arrested by civic authorities, the bailiffs would likely release them sooner.³⁶ Whether the vendors ever peddled their wares exclusively to particular social groups comprising their primary market—in modern terms, whether they “targeted an audience”—is an open question, and one that is hard to answer based on available evidence. Consumers were likely self-selecting, attracted by the subject matter, a woodcut figure, or the reputation of the author. But there is little hard evidence to indicate exactly who purchased pamphlets. Pamphlets could in any case easily be passed from hand to hand, making the “entire public” the *de facto* audience for such German-language literature, whatever the author’s intentions. The question of market segmentation, then, cannot be conclusively answered despite the intriguing evidence cited above.

We can at least be certain that the booksellers enjoyed busy careers, for the demand for their wares was great. Pamphlet literature mushroomed in Germany not long after Martin Luther advanced his Ninety-five Theses in 1517. A sample audit of 356 pamphlets conducted by Köhler suggests that the number of pamphlets printed in Latin rose swiftly, leading the way until about 1520, when they were overtaken by those printed in Upper (or Southern) German. By 1523 the production of Latin pamphlets had dropped back nearly to pre-Reformation levels, while the number of German pamphlets

³⁵ Eisenstein, *Printing Press as Agent*, 309.

³⁶ Reinhard Wittman, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels* (München: C.H. Beck, 1999) in *Geschichte des deutschen Buchwesens*, ed. Mark Lehmann, CD ROM (Berlin: Directmedia, 2000), 7798.

had grown by a factor of four.³⁷ It is fair to infer that authors and printers swiftly learned that pamphlets printed in the vernacular opened up a much larger market than those printed in Latin. And as Ukena has noted, it was this that enabled the pamphlet to influence public opinion (see above, pp. 43, 44).

Although social historians often treat pamphlets as vehicles for propaganda and/or commodities to be marketed, Matheson cautions against too rashly imposing the intentions of modern propagandists or marketers onto the authors of sixteenth-century pamphlets.³⁸ Those who produced pamphlets were certainly interested in seeing them sold, and there was certainly a marketplace for them. But Matheson argues that many authors wrote from “personal distress or a sense of vocation rather than . . . a concern for the techniques or social strategies of propaganda.”³⁹ Even Nuremberg’s sophisticated and erudite city secretary, Lazarus Spengler, was “intensely personal” in his 1519 pamphlet defending Martin Luther.⁴⁰ Early Reformation pamphlets often began as sermons, meditations, private letters, or contributions to a debate. They were often written in the expectation that the world would soon reach its inevitable end and must be put to rights without delay. Thus, as we take a brief look at some of those who authored early Reformation pamphlet literature, it is important to place their creative efforts in historical context and be mindful of the sense of crisis and urgency that so often accompanied them. At the same time, we should be mindful of the power of print

³⁷ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 55.

³⁸ Cf. Halaz, *The Marketplace of Print*; Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, esp. chap. 1; Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, esp. chap. 1; Eisenstein, *Printing Press as Agent*, 23.

³⁹ Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 47.

⁴⁰ Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 209.

to amplify such personal crises of conscience and transform them into social movements. For the pamphlet's potential to influence public discourse in unpredictable ways could be unsettling to urban governments like Nuremberg's.

Chrisman in *Conflicting Visions of Reform, German Lay Propaganda Pamphlets, 1519-1530* (1996), as we have seen above, notes that lay authors of each social rank tended to advance their own rank's visions and goals.⁴¹ This was certainly evident in Nuremberg, where, as we have seen, the Reformation was introduced by patricians and high civil servants in hopes of securing further control over a church they considered corrupt. Nuremberg's artisans joined the movement from a somewhat different perspective, writing pamphlets that demonstrated the common man's right to read and interpret Scripture. Chrisman reports that Scripture, rather than quotations from Martin Luther, other clerics, or one another, "was the only source used by the artisan writers."⁴² Yet, their subject matter was as varied as the individuals who wrote it. Some artisans questioned such traditional practices as the performance of good works or directed prayer, as did Nuremberg's artist Hans Greiffenberger.⁴³ Some worried about the divisions the Reformation movement was creating in society, as did Nuremberg's cobbler, Hans Sachs.⁴⁴ Others hoped for better care for the poor and wrote of the love of one's neighbor, as did the pseudonymous artisan N. Fassnacht.⁴⁵ Each

⁴¹ Ibid., 227-9.

⁴² Ibid., 162.

⁴³ Hans Greiffenberger, *Ein kurtzer begriff von guten wercken . . .* (Nuremberg: Jobst Gutknecht, 1524), Fiche 343/#967; idem., *Ein warnung vor dem Teuffel/ der sich wider uebt mit seinem dendelmacht. . .* (Nuremberg: Jobst Gutknecht, 1524), Fiche 1198/#3019.

⁴⁴ Hans Sachs, *Eyn gesprech eyne Euangelischen Christen/ mit einem Lutherischen. . .* (Nuremberg: Hieronymus Höltzel, 1524), Fiche 1051/#2656.

⁴⁵ N. Fassnacht [pseudonym, probably Hans Herbst], *Dem Edlen vnd Vesten Ersamen vnd weysen Wolff Christoffel von Wissenthaw genannt Amptman/ Burgermeistern un Rathe zu Schwabash bekannt*

made his own points and cited his own set of Biblical passages in support. Pamphlets authored by artisans not only offer a window into several of that rank's concerns, but also on the liberating nature of the Reformation movement. This was not a group accustomed to taking the initiative in most matters. As Chrisman says, "That artisans openly published their opinions in pamphlets bearing their names was a revolution in itself."⁴⁶ Pamphlets authored by members of marginal social groups were themselves messages, signaling that new avenues of influence were now open. Print thus threatened to disrupt the accepted social order by being available to those whose vocation did not include putting their own opinions before the public.

Women, who were normally expected to keep a becoming silence, also expressed their newfound Protestant faith in print. No fewer than nine women are thought to have authored Reformation pamphlets, suggesting new opportunities for yet another silent group to find its voice, contribute to discourse, and offer challenges.⁴⁷ Three of the nine, including a noblewoman, a former nun, and a housewife, wrote pamphlets that circulated in Nuremberg in 1524/25.

Prominent among them was Argula von Grumbach, a "Christian woman of the Bavarian nobility," as the title page of one of her pamphlets—which included two

(Nuremberg: Hieronymus Höltzel, 1524), Fiche 1316/#2436. The name *Fassnacht* was probably intended as a reference to Shrove Tuesday, or Carnival, a time when the social world was temporarily inverted and the lies and tyrannies of the ruling authorities uncovered and displayed.

⁴⁶ Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 160.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

Nuremberg editions—describes her.⁴⁸ Grumbach, who lived near Ingolstadt, felt moved to compose open letters in defense of a student who had promulgated the writings of Luther and Melancton at the University of Ingolstadt, but had been forced to recant by university and civil authorities. The letters placed her in direct conflict with distinguished academics, whom she unhesitatingly mocked. She was, says Matheson, “quite abrupt and challenging . . . [but] very conscious of being a woman, a non-expert, of doing something quite unprecedented.”⁴⁹ Well-versed though she was in Scripture, Grumbach, like almost all female pamphleteers, had been denied any schooling in Latin and was further hobbled by the common prejudice against women speaking out in public, especially on religious matters. Uncomfortably for a Protestant, the stricture was biblical:

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.⁵⁰

There was, however, a useful counter-passage: “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.”⁵¹ This more inclusive language of Joel, which appeared as a preface to Grumbach’s published letter to the University of Ingolstadt, opened the door to the “prophesies” of women. It may also have spoken to

⁴⁸ Argula von Grumbach, *Wie eyn Christliche fraw des adels / in Beiern durch jren / in Gotlicher schrift / wolgegründten Sendtbrieffe / die Hohenschul zü wydersprechung des wort Gottets betrange habe / straffet* (Nuremberg: Friedrich Peypus, 1523) Fiche 285/#819.

⁴⁹ Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 137.

⁵⁰ 1 Cor. 14:34, 35 Revised Standard Bible

⁵¹ Joel 2:28 Revised Standard Bible

the sense of urgency Grumbach felt, with the church in such desperate need of reform and end times so swiftly approaching. “Here, if anywhere,” says Matheson, “we see an individual conscience compelled to seek the public stage.”⁵² Grumbach’s first pamphlet ran to fourteen editions within two months, including the two published in Nuremberg, suggesting that many enjoyed seeing pompous authority figures effectively scolded by a plainspoken woman who knew her Scripture. The woodcut on one of her pamphlets shows her on the left, standing alone, an open Bible in her hand. To the right stand no fewer than nine theologians from the University of Ingolstadt, one of whom dangles a threatening glove from a cord as he points directly at her. Armed with Scripture, the woodcut seems to say, even a woman can withstand the threats of powerful men. It is a rare image, looking as it does with favor on a woman who is asserting herself as an individual. The invocation of Scripture permitted such social transgressions.

Most of the other female pamphlet authors were associated in some way with the cloister—either writing to someone inside or justifying their departure from the cloistered life. The latter testimonies likely intensified the anti-clerical feelings that already ran strong in cities like Nuremberg, as evidenced by the scurrilous rhymes and ribald sayings with which monks were so often greeted on the streets.⁵³ One such account, by a young woman named Florentina von Oberweimar, included a foreword by Martin Luther himself. Luther used her first-person account of forced service, imprisonment, torture, and escape from the New Helfta convent, near Eisleben, as a case in point in his campaign to eliminate convents and monasteries from society.

⁵² Matheson, *The Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 130.

⁵³ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 174.

Oberweimer's account was a moving one and required a second press run in both Nuremberg and Wittenberg to satisfy demand.

Another group that enjoyed unprecedented exposure in print was supposedly the peasants, but of twelve pamphlets ostensibly written by peasants during the early Reformation none was in fact authored by one. The presence of Latin phrases and other clues betray the authors as educated men.⁵⁴ What is interesting is that the educated felt moved to misrepresent themselves as peasants, perhaps to garner a warmer response on the part of the "common man," an audience it suddenly seemed important to reach and influence. It is also possible that such "peasant" authors were attempting to foster the appearance of a public opinion already formed, and thus more appealing to potential followers.

Some pamphlets directed toward peasants dropped the pretense of the author's membership in the peasant class and advanced radical agendas from an educated but sympathetic perspective—notably, *To the Assembly of Common Peasantry* (1525).⁵⁵ That pamphlet, printed in Nuremberg in secret, was intended to justify rebellion in the hearts and minds of peasants already in the field and to embolden them in their goal to replace worldly lords with godly ones. The author remains unknown, which is not unusual. A great many pamphleteers found it advisable to hide behind the mask of anonymity in an era when purveyors of disruptive ideas could be imprisoned, banished,

⁵⁴ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 16.

⁵⁵ Anonymus, *An die Versammlung gemayner Pawerschafft* (Nuremberg: Hieronymus Höltzel, 1525), Fiche 1434/#3802.

or worse. But scholars believe from the nature of his learned references that the author of *To the Assembly of Common Peasantry* was a preacher who held a university degree.⁵⁶

The great majority of pamphlet authors of the early Reformation were in fact educated clerics—theologians, priests, and monks, or former priests and monks. As Scribner reminds us, “The Reformation was not precipitated by laymen from outside the ecclesiastical and social establishment, but from within, by the clergy”⁵⁷ Fourteen of the eighteen leading pamphleteers from 1518-1525 were clergymen, and one of the four remaining was Philipp Melanchthon, who taught theology at Wittenberg.⁵⁸ A sample audit conducted by Arnold of 368 pamphlets published in 1524 shows that of those identifiable by author, at least 171—forty-six percent—were written by clerics.⁵⁹ Of the 118 pamphlets catalogued thus far as the product of Nuremberg presses from 1524/25, fifty-five—again, forty-six percent—originated with the clergy.

The content of clerical pamphlets was often drawn from sermons, which Schwitalla calls the most important text form of the Reformation.⁶⁰ Sermons, which often addressed the controversial issues of the day, could easily be “taken off the shelf,”

⁵⁶ Siegfried Hoyer and Bernd Rüdiger, *An die Versammlung Gemeiner Bauernschaft, eine revolutionäre Flugschrift aus dem Deutschen Bauernkrieg (1525)* (Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1975), 25-27.

⁵⁷ Robert Scribner, “Heterodoxy, literacy, and print in the early German Reformation,” in Peter Biller and Anne Hudson, eds., *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 265.

⁵⁸ Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 26.

⁵⁹ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

re-worked, and quickly placed into print in response to a challenge. And since they had originally been written for the ear, they worked very well in text, a medium that was often oral as well as visual.

The undisputed leader of Reformation pamphleteering, as of Reformation writing generally, was Martin Luther. Köhler records that 903 pamphlet editions written by Luther were in circulation by 1530, and one in three was a sermon.⁶¹ The Great Reformer actually authored no fewer than twenty percent of all Reformation pamphlets written before 1550.⁶² Where many authors wrote anonymously to avoid detection and official censure, Luther's name generally appeared proudly on the title page of the pamphlets he authored, along with wording added by the printer to remind the reader of Luther's education and position. It is a piece of evidence that the display of Luther's name increased the chances of a sale. He was the single most popular pamphleteer in Nuremberg during the years 1524/25, with twenty pamphlets to his name, fourteen more than his nearest "competitor."

Yet one's name in print did not always signify a positive public perception. The world of print also enabled open, *ad hominem* invective, much as on-line chat forums do in the early twenty-first century. When Luther and the radical reformer Thomas Müntzer traded invective in 1524, for example, Müntzer, in his pamphlet, *A Highly Provoked Vindication and Refutation of the Unspiritual Soft-Living Flesh in Wittenberg*

⁶¹ Köhler, *Bibliographie der Flugschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts*; Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 27.

⁶² Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 56.

(1524), called Luther *Dr. Lügner*, *Dr. Ludibrii*, and *vatter leisendrutt* (Dr. Liar, Dr. Lampooner, Father Pussyfoot).⁶³ Luther, he wrote, was a “vulture-like crow, living off carrion, pecking out the eyes of the wealthy to blind them to the truth.”⁶⁴ The pamphlet, whose sole edition was printed clandestinely in Nuremberg, was a response to Luther’s earlier tract, *Letter to the Princes of Saxony concerning the Rebellious Spirit* (1524), in which Luther called Müntzer “a fanatic, a cannibalistic monster, . . . the Satan of Allstedt.”⁶⁵ This new ability to call people names in print before thousands of readers and listeners occurred at a time when naming was serious business, when people could be burned alive for taking God’s name in vain. Print, as Matheson points out, brought a new power to wound.

Nor did one always know the identity of one’s attacker. Individuals could be subjected to anonymous character assassination launched behind the curtain of print. Whoever came into possession of a document that was not intended for public exposure, for example, could publish it and so make a fool of the author.⁶⁶ One such pamphlet, *A Missive or Letter the Abbess of Nuremberg Wrote to the Highly Famous Goat Emser* (1523), included the full text of an admiring letter written by Nuremberg’s Caritas Pirckheimer, abbess of St. Clara’s, to Luther’s ardent literary opponent, Hieronymus Emser. The letter was apparently intercepted and published by a Reformation cleric who ridiculed Pirckheimer through running marginal notes printed

⁶³ Matheson, *Rhetoric of the Reformation*, 145, n. 126. The German terms are rendered here as in the original.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁶⁶ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 25.

in smaller type.⁶⁷ Though the location of the press was represented on the title page as Wittenberg, scholars have identified the work as a product of the Nuremberg press of Hieronymus Höltzel. The author has never been positively identified, but scholars suspect it was Andreas Osiander.⁶⁸ Thus, not everyone who wrote the text of a Reformation pamphlet knew that he or she was doing so—nor, later, who was holding him or her up to derision, or worse. Print intensified the vicious edge sometimes presented in public discourse.

The great variety among those who authored pamphlets in the early Reformation—in terms of their intentions, their social status, their level of education, their differing spiritual and social concerns, and their political astuteness—presents only one set of difficulties when it comes to organizing early Reformation pamphlet literature into a coherent picture. Some pamphlets included multiple texts originating from authors with differing, even opposing, intentions. As we have just seen, *A Missive or Letter the Abbess of Nuremberg Wrote to the Highly Famous Goat Emser* includes both, Caritas Pirckheimer's original letter and derisive commentary. Similarly, *A Poetic Answer to One from the University of Ingolstat* by Argula von Grumbach (1524) includes both, the original attack on Grumbach and her response.⁶⁹ Some pamphlets include no fewer than five separate texts, which may have been printed at different

⁶⁷ Caritas Pirckheimer [Andreas Osiander], *Eyn Missive oder Sendbrieff/ so die Ebtissin von Nurmberg/ an den Hochbrumbten Bock Empser geschriben hat* (Nuremberg: Hieronymus Höltzel, 1523) Fiche 1126/#2876.

⁶⁸ Köhler, *Bibliographie der Flugschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Vol. 3, 269.

⁶⁹ Argula von Grumbach, *Eyn Antwort in gedichtss weiss/ ainem auss der hohen Schul zo Ingolstat* (Nuremberg: Hieronymus Höltzel, 1524) Fiche 285/#820.

times by different authors or even on different presses to be joined together later.⁷⁰

Such complexities compound the already significant problem of categorization.

Different scholars approach the problem in different ways, depending on their focus. Schwitalla in *Deutsche Flugschriften, 1460-1525* (1983), for example, conducts a study of authorial intentions and the way text forms served those intentions. From four broad categories of pamphlet rhetoric—instructional, exhortative, argumentative, or relationship-defined—Schwitalla creates twenty-one subsets. He sorts these subsets by ten textual forms, whether sermon, dialogue, letter, commentary, thesis, agreement, mandate, poetry, parody, or summary. His findings indicate how certain rhetorical intentions are associated with certain textual forms—for example, that most argumentative and accusatory polemics are expressed in the form of dialogues.⁷¹

Miriam Usher Chrisman, whose goal is to “determine common themes and attitudes” among the lay authors she studies, begins by classifying the author’s rhetorical form—narrative, dramatic, discursive, reflective, or imitative—and then the author’s language in terms of word choice, grammar, and tone. Chrisman applies a third category, content analysis, to consider “the religious ideas expressed.” Based on these categories she is able to distinguish patterns that help identify the social standing of anonymous lay pamphlet authors.⁷²

⁷⁰ Johannes Schwitalla, *Deutsche Flugschriften, 1460-1525* (Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1983), 33.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 26-111.

⁷² Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 5,6.

Robert Scribner's *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (1981) uses the methods and concepts of iconography and semiology to examine how Reformation ideas were presented and understood through visual media. Scribner classifies pamphlets by the segments of culture they address through their woodcut illustrations. Those using signs from secular popular culture, for example, might set a scene at a common game or contest or refer to some practice associated with carnival. They might satirize a known person or office through a familiar animal metaphor or desecrate some sacred person or symbol by relating it to a basic human function. In each of those cases they would be using familiar artifacts of popular culture to foster understanding.

Those using signs from popular belief might bring the image of a mill into play to symbolize transformation; of a ship to symbolize the perilous passages of life or belief; or a wheel of fortune to symbolize fatalism, warning that those on top inevitably fall. Yet other pamphlets pressed commonly understood symbols like that of the Antichrist into service to destroy the charisma of the papacy. Visual Reformation propaganda, Scribner concludes, succeeded when it drew on familiar codes: anticlericalism, socio-economic grievance, biblical images, proverbs, and "root paradigms" such as the opposition of light and darkness.

The aim of this thesis is more modest. It is to examine a small group of printers in Nuremberg and see what conclusions can be drawn from the publishing choices they made during two crucial years of the Reformation. That question will be approached by

considering the run of each printer's output during 1524/25, considering its author's intentions, how it was received, and the risks the printer undertook to produce it. By weighing the printer's marketing calculus against his or her political risks and ideological orientation, this thesis will seek to answer how printers engineered their role as agents of influence in this new era of public discourse.

The audiences so influenced were heterogeneous. Indeed, Schwitalla reports that only in the early Reformation and the social upheavals after 1789 did pamphlets reach all strata of the population.⁷³ It is interesting, then, that messages from pamphlets, a product intended to be read, reached so many different people who could not read. Chapter 2 quoted several historians, including Scribner, Matheson, Schwitalla, and Rössing-Hager, who have argued that the pamphlet worked in the context of an existing oral/visual culture. It is worth exploring how that interaction took place.

"It may be a conceit or at least a naïveté of our modern, literate culture," remarks Edwards, "to fail to recognize how well the illiterate could get access to the printed page."⁷⁴ Indeed, after hearing the story of Münster's defenders shooting pamphlets and broadsheets over their walls to reach their besiegers in 1534, a modern audience could be forgiven for forming the ridiculous mental picture of an army of sixteenth-century mercenaries bent over in silent reading. The more likely picture, and the one probably envisioned by Münster's besieged Anabaptists, was that the few literate soldiers out there would begin reading the pamphlets aloud, "infecting" their

⁷³ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 33.

⁷⁴ Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 38.

fellows, who would spread the word and engender discussion until, at length, the entire force would reach a consensus, acknowledge the error of its ways, and decamp. The belief that a mercenary army could so easily be talked out of its job may have been unrealistic, but not the expectation that word could spread effectively from a piece of print. Such expectations place one in mind of Cole's memorable phrase that during the Reformation "Words in print became virtual missiles."⁷⁵

If it originated from a sermon, a pamphlet's association with oral culture began even before it was printed. The emphasis on "hearing the word" in the early Reformation can hardly be overstated, and as we saw in Chapter 2, burghers became militantly protective of preachers who proclaimed the "pure Word of God." A printed sermon was an authoritative text that in effect placed the reader—and any listeners—in front of the original preacher, experiencing the sermon vicariously without fear that a false or unintended word was being uttered. That was likely a fresh experience for those who had been forced to evaluate hearsay and rumor most of their lives, and a stimulating one at a time when listeners had begun to interrupt and ask questions.

Once in print, a pamphlet's title might first be read out in the marketplace by a colporteur. Others might feel moved to deliver a public reading, as did Nuremberg clerk Erasmus Wisperger with one of Carlstadt's pamphlets in the market square in 1524.⁷⁶ The pamphlet's greatest impact, however, came not from the calls of street

⁷⁵ Cole, "Reformation printers," 327-339.

⁷⁶ Robert Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1987), 54, 55.

vendors or vocal challenges mounted by believers like Wisperger, but at social gatherings, where it added its influence to other forms of communication. Those who bought pamphlets probably did so because they were prepared to support and share their content. They would have served as advocates and opinion leaders, with their reading or otherwise sharing the pamphlet's content acting as a first step toward involvement of the illiterate. "Sebastian Rost, a clerk at the monastery of Thamsbruck in Saxony, took Lutheran books to spinning bees, and tried to talk folk there into accepting the ideas they contained," reports Scribner.⁷⁷ In 1524 those who preached from books in the inns of Basel began drawing complaints.⁷⁸ A baker arrested for heresy in Munich in 1525 had heard his master "read out from a book that the Virgin was a woman like any other, that she could not intercede for anyone, and that one should honour her for her son's sake or not at all."⁷⁹ Thus, at taverns, church ales or spinning bees, incident by incident, the bridges between print and oral culture were constructed and pamphlet messages were carried forth. Much took place in a charged atmosphere of verbal sparring and contentious dialogue. Those messages were often spread in the context of complaint and arrest, suggesting conflict not only among urban dwellers, but also between burghers and their governing authorities.

Scribner calls opinion formed in these social settings the *public opinion of sociability*, whose "emerging expression of opinion [politicians] neglected to their peril."⁸⁰ He suggests two further categories of public opinion formed at the local level:

⁷⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 57.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁸⁰ Scribner, "Heterodoxy, literacy and print," 262.

public opinion of the streets and the market, which included chance street encounters and conversations, and *private public opinion*, arising from the home or workplace, “but which were none the less public knowledge.”⁸¹ In each of these, the pamphlet added its voice, supporting some positions, challenging others, and fomenting contention, and provoking further discussion.

Those who published pamphlets were shrewd enough to see how various texts were being received and discussed. They had ample incentive to study the market to determine which texts were selling and which were not. While Matheson argues persuasively that pamphlet authors wrote from deep personal beliefs and motives, and while the pamphlets themselves were certainly influential in ensuing public discussions, our attention must now turn to those who decided what to contribute to this burgeoning culture of contention—the printers themselves.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Chapter 4

Printers and the Craft of Print

From its beginnings in the mid-fifteenth century, the craft of printing by movable metal type has always entailed risk. In order to be successful—indeed, in order to survive in his chosen craft—the early modern printer had to become an aggressive master of marketing as well as production. Every craft relied on the sale of its products, of course, but most craftsmen made products to order or, in the case of the food trades, served an assured market. The printer, unless he was printing for hire, had no such assurance. Every press run was a calculated risk. Sales alone sustained the enterprise.

The printing press was not even a century old in 1517, when Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses gave rise to the flood of print described in Chapter 3. But the press had already followed late medieval trade routes east to Turkey and west to England, far from its origins in Mainz.¹ Clearly, it met a need. In 1456 the Florentine bookseller Vespatiano da Bisticci reportedly required the work of forty-five scribes and a period of twenty-two months to copy out two hundred manuscripts commissioned by Cosimo de Medici for the library of the Badia di Fiesde. Only ten years later, Florentine architect Leon Battista Alberti described how with a press it was possible to have more than two hundred volumes reproduced in one hundred days from the original with the labor of no more than three men.²

¹ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change, Communication and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 179.

² Brian Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 3. The story of da Bisticci's scribes, quoted in Richardson's work and based on da Bisticci's *Le vite*, has been discredited by modern scholars as a useful means of estimating rates of production. See Eisenstein, *Press As Agent of Change*, 45. Yet, da Bisticci's and Alberti's observations are

The speed and economy of the press made it welcome everywhere, at least initially. By 1500, presses were operating in some 252 European cities, including sixty-two in Germany.³ Though presses sustained themselves best in centers of international trade, where distribution networks, ready capital, and access to paper provided the most fertile economic soil,⁴ Germany's thirteen university towns each boasted at least one press by 1500.⁵

Printing proved a lucrative business for the successful, so it is not surprising that many were eager to join it.⁶ And entry was virtually unrestricted. As a new craft, print was not subject to the governance of guilds.⁷ Those taking up the craft came from a variety of backgrounds, including "the unqualified and the unscrupulous, the mere adventurers and the speculators" as well as the ambitious and the dedicated.⁸ The thousands of German printers at work ca.1500 included former scribes, manuscript dealers, paper dealers, painters, clerics, notaries, secretaries, academics, professional men, and men trained in the metal crafts. These characters ranged from those the Strasbourg preacher Geiler von Keyzersberg put down as "clowns and bathhouse attendants" to men like Anton Koberger, whose old family and professional distinction enabled his election to the Nuremberg City Council.⁹

probably valid, at least in general terms, as a description of the gulf between the copyist's labors and those of the printer.

³ Wittman, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, 7743.

⁴ Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing*, 18; Wittman, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, 7743.

⁵ Wittman, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, 7743.

⁶ Rudolf Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading 1450-1550* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967), 44.

⁷ In an isolated case, the city of Strassbourg attempted to compel printers to join guilds in 1502. Ibid., 28.

⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁹ Ibid., 22.

Koberger, who first set his press up in Nuremberg in 1473, specialized in “large folios of popular or widely used works, handsomely printed and often beautifully illustrated.”¹⁰ At the height of his activities he ran twenty-four presses and employed more than two hundred journeymen and apprentices. That, combined with his trans-European bookselling enterprises, made him the biggest single printer of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.¹¹ He kept factors busy in a dozen cities across Europe, from Antwerp to Budapest, with book warehouses near all major markets.

Koberger was a shrewd and energetic businessman who engaged in partnerships with distant printers to save the costs of transport and free his own presses up for more work. He needed a measure of shrewdness, for even established printers of “good” repute were capable of underhanded dealing. It was an easy matter, for example, for a printer in another city to overprint a job contracted by Koberger, then sell in competition to him, or even to sell for himself the books Koberger had paid him to print. Strasbourg printer Adolph Rusch once confided to Adam Petri, a printer in Basel:

I have in my possession about one hundred *Glossae* which I retained without Koberger’s knowledge, as a kind of saving, so that I may have some money to pay for daily needs at home.¹²

Koberger’s organization prospered up to his death in 1513. Toward the end it had become less involved with printing than with publishing and distribution, but it still relied

¹⁰ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 259.

¹¹ Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing*, 25.

¹² Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 57.

on Koberger's extraordinary drive and managerial abilities. His sons could not sustain the firm without him. The last book published by the Kobergers, issued in 1526, was printed on another's press.

The failure of a print shop was not uncommon, though the reasons for the failure could include anything from poor management to loss of a patron. Competition was keen and a single miscalculated print run could prove ruinous for one without financial reserves. If, excluding those who merely changed locations, we arbitrarily classify a print shop that closed within three years of its opening as a failed venture, we find that eight of twenty-five printers failed among those operating in Nuremberg between the years 1500 and 1530. Similar figures can be cited for Strasbourg (seven failed of twenty-six) and Cologne (six failed of thirty-two),¹³ and this in an industry that had already undergone a shakeout in the 1480s, when general overproduction led to widespread failures.¹⁴

As Hirsch explains, the risks were manifold. First came the expense of the press itself and the equipment necessary to run it. Then came the high cost of paper and the need to find, pay, and manage qualified workers. Finally, there was the problem of selecting the text to be printed and estimating the press run, "which had to be large enough to justify the considerable investment and yet not too large to leave the producer with too many unsold copies."¹⁵ These factors are worth examining in greater detail.

¹³ Benzing, *Die Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, 233-240, 351-357, 437-443.

¹⁴ Wittman, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, 7747.

¹⁵ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 29.

It was not the press, but the type that represented a printer's single greatest capital investment. Even the most modest of printers required at least two or three different fonts for body text and decorative uses, and most compositor trays included five or ten Schwabacher and Roman fonts in various sizes.¹⁶ An established shop with four working presses might use thirty fonts.¹⁷ Typefounding was a lengthy, multi-staged process, involving graving, casting, planing, and the most painstaking measurement. The required skills drew a large proportion of goldsmiths into the field, for their proficiency with files and gravers was essential in the early steps of this process. Printers who possessed full sets of steel punches and casting equipment could cast type at will, but many could only afford to purchase finished type, and some could only rent it. Materné reports that the amount of type required to keep a press busy cost about ten times the value of the press itself.¹⁸ Master printers disciplined workers who left type lying carelessly around the shop, where it could be damaged in the course of a business day.

The cost of a completely equipped print shop varied depending on the ambitions of the printer and the capital available to him. The smallest establishments had only one or two presses, but prosperous ones might include six, and giants like Koberger, as we have seen, could keep twenty-four busy. The total cost of establishing a press at the monastery of St. Ulrich and Afra in Augsburg in 1472/3 reportedly was 700 guilders, the

¹⁶ Karl Schottenloher, *Philipp Ulhart, ein Augsburger Winkeldrucker und Helfershelfer der "Schwärmer" und "Wiedertäufer," 1523-1529* (Munich: Verlag von Dr. F.P. Datterer & CIE, 1921) 11, 12; Hans-Jörg Künast, *"Getruckt zu Augspurg", Buchdruck und Buchhandel in Augsburg zwischen 1468 und 1555* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997), 58.

¹⁷ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 33.

¹⁸ Jan Materné, "Social Emancipation in European Printing Workshops before the Industrial Revolution," in *The Workplace before the Factory, Artisans and Proletarians, 1500-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 211.

equivalent of about 180 tons of wheat.¹⁹ One printer sold five presses and “what belonged to them” to the monastery for 73 guilders.²⁰ In 1524, Augsburg’s Johann Schönsperger sold his shop’s equipment, including an unspecified number of presses and fonts, for 3,068 guilders, which at that time represented the taxable wealth of about 300 households of moderate means.²¹ It is not surprising to learn that a number of press workers became masters by marrying the widow of a printer and taking over a going concern.

On top of the capital expenses, a printer incurred significant operating expenses, including paper on which to print and the labor required to set the type and work the presses. Nuremberg possessed Germany’s oldest paper mill, which had operated since 1390 on the clear waters of the Pegnitz as that river entered the city. But the advent of print increased demand so much that paper had to be imported from Strasbourg and elsewhere.²² The paper, fashioned from meshed linen fibers, varied in cost according to its quality and size. Most commonly, it came in sheets about 45 x 31.5 cm.

In Frankfurt, five hundred sheets of good paper cost just over half a guilder in 1536.²³ Presuming prices were not greatly different in Nuremberg a decade earlier, a folio book of 250 leaves, or 125 sheets, would have incurred a paper expense of about one

¹⁹ Hans Widmann, “Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels,” in *Der deutsche Buchhandel* (Hamburg: Verlag für Buchmarkt-Forschung, 1975), 26; Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 33. The comparative value of money is always problematical, with so many different coins in circulation whose exchange rates varied significantly over time. A gold coin weighing about 3.5 grams was called a florin, a ducat, a gulden, or a guilder, depending on the city in which it was minted, but its worth is best determined by what it could purchase at a given place and time. Monetary references made here are meant chiefly to convey a sense of the value of a print shop’s equipment and the relative value assigned its workers. See Richardson, *Printing, Writers and Readers*, xi.

²⁰ Ibid., 32.

²¹ Ibid., 33; Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525*, ix.

²² Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 260.

²³ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling, and Reading*, 35.

eighth of a guilder per book.²⁴ That would place the paper cost of one thousand such books at nearly 140 guilders if one adds a reasonable ten percent for press proofs, wastage, and damaged paper. The paper cost of one thousand pamphlets, on the other hand, probably amounted to only about a single guilder for a simple, four-page piece in quarto format. The true figure was probably even less, since cheaper, inferior quality paper was thought good enough for pamphlets. Hirsch notes that paper and labor were roughly equivalent expenses until the falling cost of paper reduced it to about a third of the total some time during the latter sixteenth century.²⁵

Labor, of course, presented challenges of its own. Just as printers entered the craft from a variety of backgrounds, so did their journeymen and apprentices. They brought various abilities into the shop, from knowledge of Latin to a strong back and physical endurance. If one looks at the oldest woodcut depicting the interior of a print shop (1499), one sees the essential tasks involved.²⁶ On the left sits a *Setzer*, or compositor, before a tray divided into small compartments containing type sorted by character and size. His source text is set up on a clip so that he need only lift his eyes for reference, and in his hand is a composing stick into which he is placing type. Completed lines of type were made up into pages. A compositor was expected to present a full set of pages when pressmen were ready for them and thus was always under time pressure. He may have worked twelve to fourteen hours per day, and often by candlelight, to prepare eight pages

²⁴ Ibid., 37, n. 30. It probably makes more sense to speak in terms of fractions of a guilder than to resort to tables showing how schillings, kreuzers, and pfennigs added up from time to time and place to place.

²⁵ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 39, 40.

²⁶ Walther G. Oschilewski, *Der Buchdrucker, Brauch und Gewohnheit in alter und neuer Zeit* (Itzehoe: Verlag Veruf & Schule, 1955), 24, fig. 6, from "Danse macabre," Lyon, 1499.

for one sheet to be printed front-to-back in quarto format.

Compositors were necessarily educated. Often they were failed students or young men of the educated estates whose fortunes had not gone well.²⁷ Sebastian Brant depicted presswork as the vocation of last resort for such young men in *Narrenschiff* (1494):

Students should likewise not be skipped,
With fool's caps they are well equipped.
.....
For when of books they should be thinking,
They go carousing, roistering, and drinking,
.....
Returning home in sheer disgrace,
The money spent in idleness,
They're glad to tend a printing press.²⁸

The influx of so many ex-students left its mark on the culture of print. An apprentice who had finished his term under a master printer faced the transition to journeyman only after undergoing a ceremony clearly borrowed from the university. Newcomers were made to dress up in a rough wig, complete with horns, teeth and claws and undergo a metamorphosis from animal to human at the hands of their soon-to-be fellow journeymen, who made much ceremony about the de-horning of the beast. University freshmen underwent essentially the same hazing. While the ceremony is first described in connection with print in late sixteenth-century Frankfurt, it had probably been making its way through print shops for some time.²⁹

²⁷ Kapp, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels*, 1 Bd., 594.
²⁸ Quoted in Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 20.
²⁹ Oschilewski, *Buchdrucker, Brauch und Gewohnheit*, 31-33.

More to the point, a journeyman could not aspire to become a master unless he was literate as well as knowledgeable about the mechanics of production. The need to deal with scholars, to edit, and to proof text, brought the mechanical and the liberal arts together in a new way, creating a unique occupational culture. "Texts were handled in a bustling commercial establishment where robed scholars and merchants worked alongside craftsmen and mechanics."³⁰ Often, says Eisenstein, the master printer was a scholar who combined both roles. Minerva, goddess of knowledge, was the figure that came to be most associated with the craft of print.³¹

Compositors were generally the highest paid workers in the shop, though the amount of actual pay varied by arrangement. Some received room and board, some not. Some were paid by the month, some by the job. Some were also paid in books, which they might then sell on their own.³² One indicator of their relative worth is the amount a Padua printer in 1476 was reportedly forced to pay to replace compositors who had walked off the job, a monthly wage of four and one half guilders per compositor. The same printer had been paying two and one-half ducats per compositor, suggesting both the volatility of the labor market and the variety of currencies in which one could be paid, even in the same shop.³³

Once the compositor had prepared them, the pages were placed face-up in a bed on the press that held it securely for inking and printing. The 1499 woodcut shows two

³⁰ Eisenstein, *Press as Agent of Change*, 251.

³¹ Ibid., 143, 250.

³² Richardson, *Printing in Renaissance Italy*, 19.

³³ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 37, 38.

Druckeren, or press workers, at the press, one to ink the pages and one to operate the press. The inker applied the thick, oil-based printer's ink with leather balls stuffed with wool or horsehair to which a wooden handle had been attached. His was the easiest job in the shop, and the lowest paid. The same Padua printer who was obliged to pay new compositors four and one half guilders paid his inkers only about one third that amount.

It was the other pressman on the job, the puller, who served as the "engine" of the shop. A puller was generally paid less than a compositor, but his labor was too important to discount, and the labor market sometimes enabled him to be paid as much or, in one recorded case, even more than the shop's compositor.³⁴

In simplified terms, the puller took a sheet of moistened paper from a nearby stack, secured it to a frame on the press, rolled it beneath a heavy iron plate, and pulled a bar toward him, bringing the plate down with enough force to push the paper firmly against the inked type below. Repositioning the mobile bed so that a second page and the rest of the sheet lay beneath the platen, he made a second pull, completing one entire side. He placed the printed sheet on a new stack, then turned to begin the cycle again.

Over time, inker-puller teams found efficiencies through experience. A good team was thought capable of turning out 300 front-to-back sheets per day in the 1470s, but that number soon climbed under constant pressure to increase production. Eisenstein and Richardson together make a compelling case:

³⁴ Richardson, *Printing in Renaissance Italy*, 19.

In contrast to seasonal rhythms which governed agricultural work, or the church bells which patterned the daily rounds of the clergy, the pace set by their machines was relentless and unceasing.³⁵

By the second half of the Cinquescento, pressmen had been expected to increase their output by four- or fivefold *with the same equipment*. Those in France turned out between 1,250 and 1,675 sheets daily; that is, from 2,500 to 3,350 impressions, at an average rate of about one impression, each requiring *two pulls of the bar, every fifteen seconds in a twelve-hour day* [my emphasis].³⁶

There is nothing to suggest that such rates of production had been reached in the Nuremberg of 1524/25, but it is likely that the city's printers were headed in that direction, for profit was determined by a relentless, saleable output.

Anyone who has engaged in a repetitive task, whether working on an assembly line or merely stuffing envelopes, need not exert much historical imagination to summon up the “feel” of a working day for such a press team. One’s mind, focused on performing the current task, would always be preparing to move to the next task in the sequence, cycling through again and again, hour upon hour, working through the fatigue and pain of repetitive motion until the job was complete. The cycle of activity was complex and detailed, involving several more steps than those described above. One can imagine, at least in outline, what presswork was like in a crowded press shop where time was money and “an idle press signified disaster.”³⁷

³⁵ Eisenstein, *Press as Agent of Change*, 392.

³⁶ Richardson, *Printing in Renaissance Italy*, 24.

³⁷ Eisenstein, *Press as Agent of Change*, 392.

Nor was presswork the sole source of labor and stress. Shops carried limited quantities of costly type, which, once used, had to be removed, cleaned with lye, and sorted back into the compositor's tray, generally while a job was still underway. Pages had to be proofed, often on the run, and corrections made. Untimely accidents (e.g., a piece of type inadvertently pulled from a page by the inking balls) doubtless ruined the rhythm of production. The printed sheets, hanging damply from ropes overhead, served as a reminder that they had yet to be folded, cut, and bound or stitched for distribution.

Master printers, in the meantime, found that, efficiencies of production aside, the only way they could increase their profits was by reducing wages and increasing working hours. It was this that led to press workers' strikes and disturbances in Lyon, Paris, Venice, and Geneva.³⁸ No such strikes are recorded in Nuremberg, but it is reasonable to assume that similar dynamic tensions were at work, all driven by the economics of a fiercely competitive and labor-intensive craft. Some press workers, at least, released such tensions socially. Again, Sebastian Brant:

The printers squander coin untold,
A weekly wage a day, I'm told.
So rash their reckless, roistering way,
Although their work's laborious ay,
They print and putter, cut a die,
Set type, correct, arrange and pi,
Apply the ink—a printer's game—
Make pigments over burning flame,³⁹

³⁸ Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce*, trans. Siân Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 497-99.

³⁹ Quoted in Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 20. To "pi" is to jumble type together indiscriminately.

Brant, who once worked as a proofreader for the Basel printer Johann Amerbach, knew the world of print from personal observation.⁴⁰ The press worker's rowdy behavior, which was also commented on by one-time publisher Geiler von Keysersberg, seems to have been endemic, perhaps as a release from the heavy toil and enforced discipline of the shop. Masters doubtless had to manage pressmen with care, for despite the tensions of a twelve- or fourteen-hour working day all had to work together in an atmosphere of general interdependence and understanding to keep the presses running efficiently. Materné reports that in the seventeenth-century print shop of Christopher Plantin, in Antwerp, it was the journeymen who kept one another in line, recognizing their common need to settle disputes and keep the work flowing.⁴¹ The need for everyone to pull together seems to have been an important facet of the occupational culture of print, but in seventeenth-century Antwerp journeymen belonged to "chapels" that recognized the value of enforced social stability. As we have seen, sixteenth-century Nuremberg frowned on labor organizations of all kinds. The master printers may have had to play a stronger role there to manage their shops.

Even the most efficient management, of course, would not produce profits if the product did not sell. Gauging the state of the market on a regional and even a trans-regional basis was essential. Failure to exploit distant markets was an almost certain road to failure, for local consumption of books was limited no matter how large one's city. Hirsch points out that Venice dominated the book trade in the early days of print not because its titles were more innovative or better crafted, but because it maintained "the

⁴⁰ Kapp, *Geschichte des Deutschen Buchhandels*, 593.

⁴¹ Materné, "European Printing Workshops," 215.

best and most advanced system of commercial distribution anywhere in Europe.”⁴²

Printers “relied on learned friends to keep them informed on the program of competitors,” or so the correspondence of humanists indicates.⁴³ Thus, Nuremberg, as a dynamic crossroads of trade and center of correspondence, offered printers an essential tool for success.

Nor was gauging distant markets the only advantage Nuremberg’s status as a center of commerce offered. There were also printers who relied on friends or couriers to bring pamphlet texts clandestinely to their presses across the trade networks. In the days before copyright laws, printers were limited only by their own sense of propriety and whatever restraints local government might be persuaded to impose on them. Printers of pamphlets had ample economic incentive to be first to market with a popular new piece with or without the author’s consent. Though Luther was not enriched by his writing and did not seek to be, he was moved on behalf of his printers to write to the Nuremberg City Council on September 26, 1525:

I submit to your respectable wisdom a complaint, that our printers have had any number of devotional books that were left in the press clandestinely taken away and stolen, more than half of them. They were brought to your noble city and with haste reprinted and sold before ours were finished, thus bringing our printers to marked injury, and I do believe that Hergot has something to do with this.⁴⁴

⁴² Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 58.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁴ *Ich füge E.W. klagend zu wissen, wie dass unsern Druckern allhie etlich Sextern der Postillen, so noch im Druck gelegen, heimlich entzogen und gestohlen sind, wol über die Helft des Buchs, und in Euer löbliche Stadt bracht, und mit Eile nachgedruckt, verkauft ehe denn unsers vollendent, und also mit dem detrückten Buch die unsern in merklichen Schaden geführt, und ist mir recht, das Hergetlin soll mit dran seyn.* Quoted in Alfred Götze, *Die hochdeutschen Drucker der Reformationszeit*, (1905; reprint, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1963), 35.

Hans Hergot, based in Nuremberg, published five of the twenty pamphlets authored by Luther that were printed there during the years 1524/25. Hergot, as we shall see in greater detail in Chapter 5, had a reputation for appropriating the work of others and cashing in on it. Reprinting the work of another was not a new phenomenon; Luther's Ninety-five Theses could not have "raced through all of Germany in almost fourteen days" if printers had stopped to send for permission before setting up their presses. But the expectation advanced by Luther that a decent printer should, through Christian love, wait at least seven or eight weeks before reprinting the work of another was probably naive.⁴⁵

Another essential tool for the printer was financial backing. Sufficient capital to cover printing costs was required to get a book underway. A number of financial arrangements were possible, all involving a question of balancing risk with return. On the one hand, an author might offer to bear the responsibility of fronting the money, perhaps lining up a wealthy patron for the purpose. In such cases the risk to the printer would be minimal. But then the profits, or at least a substantial number of free books, would go to the author or patron as a return on the investment and the printer would stand to make little even in the event of a great success. Alternatively, an author might agree to purchase a certain number of the printed volumes and sell them on his own, sharing the risks with the printer as well as some of the profits. Finally, a printer convinced of a

⁴⁵ Friedrich Kapp, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels bis in das siebzehnte Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: Verlag des Börsenvereins der Deutschen Buchhändler, 1886) in *Geschichte des deutschen Buchwesens*, ed. Mark Lehmstedt, CD ROM (Berlin: Directmedia, 2000), 885.

book's potential might front his own money or that of a wealthy patron of his own, with the author receiving nothing but a few copies for friends and the satisfaction of having his name and work in circulation. In 1507 Erasmus approached the Venetian printer Aldo Manuzio in a way that sums up all three approaches. The Rotterdam scholar said that he would prefer to finance publication of two plays by Euripides he had translated, but in lieu of that would either purchase two hundred copies of the press run "at a fair price," or pay nothing toward the cost of printing and accept only a few copies of the book by way of payment.⁴⁶ In the event, the two agreed on the last approach.

Along with financing came the decision of the size of the print run. Ideally, the publisher wanted to print all the books that would sell, but no more. The number of copies comprising a given edition typically amounted to two or three hundred in the early days of print, but had risen to a thousand by 1480. By the early sixteenth century a publisher confident of his market might print as many as three thousand books.⁴⁷ Runs of pamphlets might be higher still. Luther's *To the Christian Nobility* (1520) had an initial run of four thousand copies, with several reprints following.⁴⁸ The size of these runs speaks to the expanding markets of the Renaissance and the Reformation eras.

Printers who decided to finance their own press runs often needed an influx of capital, as the record of the Augsburg printer Johann Schönsperger suggests. Schönsperger fashioned his publishing career around medical books, works by Erasmus,

⁴⁶ Richardson, *Printing, Writing and Reading*, 68, 69.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 21-23; Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 65-68.

⁴⁸ Kapp, *Geschichte des Deutschen Buchhandels*, 1 Bd., 858.

and a few Reformation works.⁴⁹ Between 1502 and 1532 he borrowed some 2,370 gulden from no fewer than twenty-five friends, relatives, and investors from as far away as Strasbourg and Nuremberg.⁵⁰ The record reflects only those debts Schönsperger had trouble paying back, suggesting both the constant challenge of recouping an investment in print and the lingering hope among investors that the potential payoffs could compensate for the risks. Indeed, when a printer did do well the results were impressive. Hirsch reports that when Augsburg printer Günther Zainer died in 1478 he left property worth 2,800 guilders, making him among the richest men in the city.⁵¹

Few printers, however, managed to play in Zainer's league. Those who did, including Johannes Froben of Basel or Anton Koberger of Nuremberg, directed their efforts toward the trans-regional book trade in large humanist texts. A list of books requested of Froben in 1517 by the Milan bookseller Francesco Calvo, includes twenty-four titles, works by Seneca, Glareanus, Herodianus, Erasmus, St. Augustine, St. Ambrosius, and Reuchlin.

Many mid-level printers confined themselves to standard textbooks, for which there existed a reasonably steady market, plus the occasional humanist text. Government or ecclesiastical commissions were always valued, for there was a steady stream of proclamations, laws, mint regulations, passports, official orations, papal letters, bulls, and indulgences to be printed. Most governments elected to distribute work to various

⁴⁹ Benzing, *Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, 15.

⁵⁰ Künast, "Getruckt zu Augspurg", 62-66.

⁵¹ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 44.

printers, perhaps to keep them all as content and secure as they could. Authorities in smaller locations, like Bamberg, sometimes designated a single printer as their official printer just to keep him in their territory.⁵² The amounts to be gained by government commissions were not generally large, but they represented secure income in an otherwise uncertain business.

Most print shops possessed only two humble presses and performed whatever jobs they could, from work subcontracted by other printers to reprints of works that had been popular elsewhere. At the bottom of the scale were the itinerant printers, those who broke down their presses and traveled from place to place as the market led them.

For the humbler printers, the publication of short texts like pamphlets alone could provide a decent living.⁵³ For more established printers with multiple presses, pamphlets could profitably be produced concurrently with books to keep all presses busy or between book projects to avoid expensive “down time.” Expenses were minimal, with cheaper paper and smaller supplies of type sufficient for that more modest product. A simple, four-page pamphlet, text only, could go from manuscript to finished product in only a few days at a cost of perhaps two guilders, figuring one guilder for paper and another for labor. Unlike the trans-regional market for books, the local market was generally the only one for pamphlets, for it was uneconomic to transport such a cheap product across the countryside where added costs priced it out of the market. And the profit, while relatively

⁵² Ibid., 53.

⁵³ Schwitalla, *Flugschrift*, 25.

modest, could be pocketed much more quickly with immediate, local sales. Thus, the pamphlet had several economic points in its favor.

Not the least of those points was a market, which, as we have seen, grew swiftly and to enormous proportions. As we shall see in greater detail in Chapter 5, Nuremberg became a center for pamphlet production during the early Reformation. Perhaps the city's introduction of Lutheran preachers early in the 1520s induced in its burghers a desire for rapid social change and a hunger for opinions and models on which to base that change. Some of the most incendiary pamphlets of the Reformation were printed in Nuremberg, as well as more conservative pamphlets, approved by the City Council. The Nuremberg pamphlet market peaked in 1524/25, with more than one hundred pamphlets, including some strong polemics, in circulation.

Yet, the larger, more prestigious printers, giants like Koberger and Froben, scarcely ever printed pamphlets.⁵⁴ Nuremberg's top men after the decline of the Koberger firm, Friedrich Peypus, Johann Petreius, and Hieronymus Andreae, printed expensive humanistic, scientific and devotional books, but no more than twenty-one pamphlets among them in 1524/25.⁵⁵ Three other Nuremberg printers, Hieronymus Höltzel, Hans Hergot, and Jobst Gutknecht, produced schoolbooks, songs, official documents, and popular works. Those three were responsible for ninety-eight pamphlets, or eighty-three

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Benzing, *Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, 354-356.

percent of those printed in 1524/25.⁵⁶ Thus, a hierarchy among printers seems to be associated with a tendency of those toward the bottom to favor the pamphlet market.

Most such pamphlets bear no printer's mark, nor any other indication of the printer's identity. That is understandable, for authorities at all levels had grown alert to the disruptive possibilities of print, and often made it risky to identify oneself with the output of one's presses. Scholars must resort to small differences and imperfections in typefaces used by various printers to identify the press from which early Reformation pamphlets were printed.

Church censorship was the first dangerous scrutiny printers had to face. Pope Sixtus IV, alerted in 1479 by Cologne theologians to production of the first Bible in Low German, granted the University of Cologne the earliest Church authorization to censor printed books. It was a move that led to the university's "invention" in the 1480s of the *imprimatur*, the license to print or publish a book.⁵⁷ The Archbishop of Mainz required similar pre-publication censorship of books in his archdiocese in 1485. A papal bull, *Inter multiplices* (1487), demanded that nothing in Christendom be printed without submission to the Magister Sacri Palatii of Rome or his deputy.⁵⁸ The bull was reissued in 1501 and renewed after a session of the Lateran Council of 1515 as *Inter sollicitudines*, specifying penalties of excommunication, the burning of the offending books, a fine of 100 ducats,

⁵⁶ Hans Joachim Köhler, *Bibliographie der Flugschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Bibliotheca Academica, 1991).

⁵⁷ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 88.

⁵⁸ "Master of the Sacred Palace," the pope's theologian.

and a one-year suspension from printing.⁵⁹ Leo X's *Exsurge Domine* (1520) specifically forbade any reproduction of Luther's work.

All of these measures stemmed from the principle that "only a priest was competent to interpret and explain divine intentions and religious mysteries on the basis of tradition, the heritage transmitted from generation to generation by the apostles and their successors, the bishops."⁶⁰ Neither that concept nor the censorship it sought to justify were new, but the number of works in circulation added new dimensions to the problem of controlling "heretical or otherwise unwelcome texts."⁶¹ Enforcement relied heavily on the support of secular authorities, whose motives had less to do with interpretation of Scripture than with the prevention of unrest. If such authorities seemed lax in their efforts to support Church censorship, it may be that they wanted to reserve the right of censorship to themselves.

The "Law of Printing," part of the Edict of Worms (1521), marked the first imperial move at censorship in its attempt to throttle Luther's texts. The decree, which demanded punishment of all associated with Lutheran writings, may have had a deeper political subtext as well. Kapp suggests that Charles V and Leo X may have struck a bargain, with the emperor agreeing to support general censorship and the pope agreeing to oppose the French in Italy. In any case, the Edict was officially applied to Nuremberg's print shops in the Nuremberg Council's recess of 1524. Perhaps it was a

⁵⁹ Margot Lindemann, *Deutsche Presse bis 1815* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1969), 50.

⁶⁰ Martin, *The French Book*, 13, 14.

⁶¹ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 87.

sop to the emperor and perhaps it was also meant to prevent the growing number of polemical pamphlets printed in Nuremberg from getting out of hand.⁶² The Nuremberg Council may have been selective in its enforcement, but it was not powerless to enforce its will. The Council had the authority to arrest and question anyone in the city, to force confessions by torture, and to punish those convicted. From its decisions there was no appeal.

The Nuremberg Council first asserted its own authority to censor print in 1491, when it forbade sales of a poem it considered libelous. In 1502 the Council passed the earliest city censorship ordinance in Germany, directing printers to present their works to the Council secretary for examination prior to production. A more definitive decree was issued by the Council in 1513, which

compelled printers, including wood block cutters, to register with the Council and swear an annual oath ‘that neither they nor their assistants will print, cut, or issue poems, books, engraved pictures or figures without first notifying the Council and awaiting the Council’s decision.’⁶³

The Council obviously considered that any “inky medium” could be threatening. While it often let offenders go with a warning, the Council could and did levy more serious punishments, including imprisonment, banishment, and even death.

⁶² Lindemann, *Deutsche Presse*, 54.

⁶³ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 216.

The early modern craft of print must thus be viewed in the context of significant economic and political risk. Printers wanted only to serve a market and to do so in relative safety. Yet, the two goals seemed to be in increasing conflict. In 1524 the printers of Leipzig petitioned their staunchly Catholic ruler, Duke Georg von Sachsen, to permit the production of Protestant pamphlets lest the printers lose “house, home, and all their livelihood.” The Catholic treatises the duke allowed the printers to produce had no market. Indeed, they could not even be given away.⁶⁴ Yet, one defied the duke at a high cost, as the Protestant Nuremberg printer, Hans Hergot, found when the duke had him beheaded in the market square for authoring a utopian pamphlet, *On the Transformation of a Christian Life* (1527).

In the absence of such determined censorship, the economics of print tended to prevail. The robust market for pamphlets was virtually unquenchable in the Nuremberg of the early Reformation. The City Council may have frowned on the production and sale of polemics that placed the pope or others in a bad light and it may have tried to suppress the embarrassing, open sale of pro-Lutheran pamphlets when the imperial diet was in town. But as we have seen, it was fighting an uphill battle. The market for pamphlet sales was there for the taking, and 118 pamphlets have thus far been catalogued as products of Nuremberg’s presses during the years 1524/25—an average of more than one per week for two years.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Mark U. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 14.

⁶⁵ Köhler, *Bibliographie*, Vols. I-III.

“The conflict between the convictions of the printer and his desire for a safe and comfortable life became sharper as the result of the repressive measures which followed in the wake of the Reformation,” says Hirsch.⁶⁶ Thus, the printer’s decision on what text to print goes to the crux of his role in the Reformation, a role that includes economic, social, religious, and personal dimensions.

126 editions of Luther’s texts poured from the city’s presses between 1518 and 1525, beginning with the German translation of Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses*.⁶⁷ Additional Reformation pamphlets numbered in the hundreds, and all but a handful were printed in the vernacular. The pamphlet market burgeoned into what Walter Rees has called the “Protestant’s Revolt,” widespread censorship started in 1525 as a means of controlling the pamphlet market, and by 1529 it had again been reduced to pre-Reformation levels.

While in 1518, Nuremberg had only eight operating presses, by 1525 there were 24.⁶⁸ Even though cities such as Strasbourg, Cologne, or Wittenberg had more operating presses than Nuremberg, only Augsburg and Wittenberg were producing Reformation pamphlets in the vernacular. Luther’s views of the Reformation’s “chief business” was to “publish and print” and “to make the people hear the word of God.”⁶⁹ The pamphlet, he wrote, was “the best and the most profitable” means of spreading the word of God.⁷⁰ Luther’s views were not only closely and pervasively reflected in the actions of the Reformation, but they also provided a model for the actions of the Reformation. The pamphlet was the “chief business” of the Reformation, and the Reformation was the “chief business” of the pamphlet.

⁶⁶ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 99.
⁶⁷ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 99.
⁶⁸ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 99.
⁶⁹ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 99.
⁷⁰ Hirsch, *Printing, Selling and Reading*, 99.

Chapter 5

The Printers of Nuremberg

“[Nuremberg’s] printers now placed their presses in the service of the Reformation.”¹ So says Vogler of the city’s printing community in 1518 as the great religious movement arrived. No fewer than 126 editions of Luther’s texts poured from the city’s presses between 1518 and 1525, beginning with the German translation of Luther’s Ninety-five Theses.² Additional Reformation pamphlets numbered in the hundreds, and all but a handful were printed in the vernacular. The pamphlet market burgeoned until 1525, when, in the wake of the Peasants’ Revolt, widespread censorship caused it to drop as suddenly as it had risen, though never again down to pre-Reformation levels.³

As we saw in Chapter 1, Nuremberg had only eight operating press shops in 1524/25, fewer than Augsburg, Strasbourg, Cologne, or Wittenberg. Yet, Nuremberg places third in the empire, behind only Augsburg and Wittenberg, as a known center of pamphlet production during the early years of the Reformation.⁴ Cologne, despite its eleven presses, produced very few pamphlets. As we have seen, the authorities in Catholic Cologne policed their city closely and permitted no market for Reformation literature to grow. Leipzig, with six presses to its credit, apparently had a market, but

¹ Vogler, *Nürnberg 1524/25*, 38.

² *Ibid.*, 38, n. 43.

³ Köhler’s research places Germany’s pamphlet production of 1527 at about a fifth of its 1525 level. Even at that, Germany was still printing about twice the number of pamphlets produced in 1518. Köhler, “Erste Schritte,” 251.

⁴ Richard G. Cole, “Reformation Printers: Unsung Heroes,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*: XV (3), 1984, 331. Cole relies on data compiled from the pamphlet collection of Gustav Freytag, comprising 3,410 sixteenth-century German pamphlets housed in the Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek, Frankfurt am Main. One hundred twenty-five places of publication are named in that collection, with Nuremberg placing third among them in terms of product. The largest single category for pamphlet production, however, is “unknown.” See Cole, “The Reformation Pamphlet,” 146. A similar analysis based on results of the Tübingen project has not been performed.

Duke Georg von Sachsen forbade his printers to serve it, so few pamphlets were printed there. Markets and the freedom to serve them were thus two essential conditions for pamphlet production. Only one other ingredient was required—enterprising printers willing to print them.

Some Nuremberg printers devoted more press time to Reformation literature than others. Some, as we have seen, ignored the pamphlet market entirely. And some were discouraged by the City Council from printing the texts they wished. Friedrich Peypus, an established printer aged thirty-three, published Luther's *Freedom to Prosecute the Sermons of Papal Indulgence and Grace* in August 1518 at the behest of Wolfgang Volprecht, prior of the local Augustinian monastery. But since Peypus went to press without first seeking the Council's approval, both he and Volprecht were called in and reprimanded. It was a warning shot across the bows of the printers and it marked the beginning of more sharply enforced censorship in the City of Nuremberg.⁵

None of Nuremberg's printer/publishers seems to have handled the dilemma between market demands and censorship in exactly the same way. In this concluding chapter we will take a brief look at each of Nuremberg's eight print shop proprietors and examine their pamphlet output. We will see how the products of Nuremberg's presses related to the events of 1524/25 and how they may have influenced public discourse. Within the boundaries of available evidence we will see whether the intent of the publisher can be discerned and how that intent fits in with the close watch Nuremberg's

⁵ Vogler, *Nürnberg 1524/25*, 39, n. 47.

City Council kept on its printers. Finally, we will consider whether any general conclusions can be drawn about the printer's role in the Nuremberg of the early Reformation.

"One of the problems in obtaining an in-depth picture of the Reformation printer," says Cole, "is that with relatively few exceptions not a great deal of information has survived. . . ." ⁶ Indeed, in some cases we have little more than the name of the printer and a handful of exemplars from his press. In other cases, a significant amount of information is available or can be inferred. Some inferences may be drawn from the pamphlets the printer produced—the number of editions published; whether they were set in German or Latin; how long and therefore how costly was the product; whether it included woodcuts and whether the woodcuts used classical or commonplace allusions; and whether the views expressed were more likely to appeal to the upper or lower strata. In examining Nuremberg's printers, we will begin with those who chose not to produce pamphlets during the early Reformation and work our way toward those whose pamphlet output was greatest.

Hans Wandereisen is one of those printers of whom little is known. His press shop, located near the inner "Laufer Gate" in the northeastern corner of the city, was set up ca. 1523. Benzing reports that Wandereisen, a formcutter, was responsible for two editions of Luther's vitriolic tract *The Papacy at Rome Founded by the Devil* (1545) and some writings by Hans Sachs, but there is no mention of Wandereisen in the City Council

⁶ Cole, "Reformation Printers: Unsung Heroes," 329.

notes from 1524/25 and no catalogued pamphlets to his credit during those years. Printers typically worked at many facets of the text trade, and it is possible that Wandereisen spent more of his time at formcutting and letter painting, the other vocation for which he is noted.

Significantly more is known about Hieronymus Andreae (d. 1556), also known as *Formschneider* (formcutter), who enjoyed a long and distinguished career in Nuremberg. Andreae began his career in Leipzig about 1504 as a skilled cutter of woodblocks, stamps, and coins. He came to Nuremberg some time before 1515 and began a collaboration with Albrecht Dürer. It was Andreae who cut the 192 woodblocks for the *Triumphal Arch of Emperor Maximilian I*, a task that required two years of labor. He also cut the eight blocks comprising *The Great Triumphal Chariot* (1522), a project conceived and executed as collaboration between Dürer and the humanist scholar/patron Willibald Pirckheimer.

Andreae became a citizen of Nuremberg in May 1523 and opened his own print shop in 1525. One of the first products of his press was Dürer's famous *Instruction on Measuring*. Andreae also published Dürer's *Treatise on Human Proportions* (1528) six months after the author's death. In addition to his work for Dürer, he published music, reprints of the German Psalters, and some devotional booklets by Martin Luther and others, a variety of products in multiple fields. Yet, he apparently published no pamphlets.

There is nothing directly from Andreae to indicate why he ignored the pamphlet market, although, as we have seen, the more prosperous Nuremberg printers tended to avoid pamphlet work (see above, pp. 104, 105). Since he published some of Luther's work and remained closely associated with the pro-Lutheran Dürer for so many years, we may presume his sympathies for the Reformation. It is possible that he, like Froben in Basel and others who specialized in the production of expensive books, simply chose not to trouble himself with the quick-and-dirty pamphlet market. There may have been a social element involved in this. Halasz has suggested that there was a perceived difference between the book, whose audience was limited to those "whose rank and status could be predicted," and the pamphlet, whose audience could be anyone, learned or illiterate.⁷ The latter, seemingly more tainted with immediate commercial interests, may have been thought beneath the efforts of the best printers.

Johann Stuchs is one from whom only a little pamphlet literature emerges—perhaps because Stuchs was arrested for one pamphlet he did print. Stuchs, who had worked under Anton Koberger and other publishers, was the son of Nuremberg printer Georg Stuchs. The younger Stuchs opened his own shop in 1509, turning out grammars, dictionaries, and arithmetics for schools. It was he who in 1515 published Johann Schöner's textbook on geography wherein the New World was first designated as America. Stuchs also printed theological, humanistic, and reform items, if little from Luther.

⁷ Halasz, *The Marketplace of Print*, 87, 88.

Stuchs in 1523 did print one polemical, pro-Luther pamphlet authored by Heinrich von Kettenbach, a renegade Franciscan monk from Ulm. Kettenbach's work had been specifically banned by the City Council, making Stuch's transgression a serious one. This particular pamphlet dismissed the Edict of Worms as the foolish advice of a misguided advisor to Emperor Charles V and it defamed both emperor and pope—and this at a time that the imperial diet was still meeting regularly in Nuremberg. Stuchs was arrested and all booksellers were called in to take an oath to sell no more booklets slandering pope or emperor. Nothing has been identified from the presses of Johann Stuchs between the years 1524 and 1527.⁸ Though Stuchs resumed printing and continued in Nuremberg until about 1540, there were no further pamphlets, suggesting that the Council's police action succeeded in turning him permanently away from that product. After 1540, his type is found in the possession of Philip Melanchthon.

Johann Petreius (1497-1550) brought the background of a scholar to his work. Born in Langendorf as Hans Peterlin, Petreius earned his baccalaureate from the University of Basel in 1515, followed by his magister artium in 1517. He began working as a proofreader for Adam Petri in 1519.

Petreius moved to Nuremberg in 1523, where he set up his own print shop a year later. Impressively, he built all of his own equipment himself, or so Götze reports.⁹ If Petreius had a specialty niche in the print market, it was for technical and scientific

⁸ Benzing, *Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, 353.

⁹ Alfred Götze, *Die Hochdeutschen Drucker der Reformationszeit* (1905; reprint, Berlin: Walter De Gruyter & Co., 1963).

works, including those of Copernicus, whose *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* he printed in 1543. He also printed official documents of the City Council, Latin Bibles, legal texts, and music. Evidence of Petreius' success is the house he purchased in 1533, where he lived until his death in 1550. Benzing reports that Petreius was regarded as the most important printer in Nuremberg after the death of Friedrich Peypus in 1534.

There are but three pamphlets from the press of Johann Petreius during the years 1524/25, and all are in Latin. They include one 66-page octavo by Johannes Bugenhagen, a widely published Lutheran preacher from Pomerania; one 24-page octavo by Sebald Heyden, a local composer who put the *Salve Regina* into a new form; and a 48-page octavo by Erasmus, *Freedom of the Will* (1524). The first two pieces proudly bear Petreius' name and his printer's mark, a flaming hand bearing a double-edged sword.

Petreius included neither his name nor his printer's mark with the Erasmian volume, a piece whose pro-free-will subject matter swam against the Lutheran tide then running in Nuremberg. One speculates that Willibald Pirckheimer may have been behind the project. Pirckheimer, a noted humanist scholar in his own right, had by then broken with his erstwhile Reformation allies on the issue of free will. He was well acquainted with Petreius, had the means to finance such a volume, and was just contrary enough to do so.¹⁰ Whether there was actually any market for the pamphlet or any profit in its production is unknown, but it may be significant that Petreius withheld his name from it,

¹⁰ Pirckheimer had a history of contrary behavior. See Jackson Spielvogel, "Patricians in Dissension: A Case Study from Sixteenth-Century Nürnberg," in *The Social History of the Reformation*, ed. Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathan W. Zophy (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972); Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 172.

choosing to associate himself instead with the Lutheran majority among Nuremberg's patricians. As with Andreae, Petreius dealt in expensive books for the educated and influential. He limited his pamphlet output to a few Latin editions that bore little resemblance to the eight-paged quartos that dominated the street market.

Friedrich Peypus (1485-1534), whose early pamphleteering met with the Council's displeasure, was born in Forchheim, Bavaria. He was an educated man who learned presswork under Anton Koberger, but he got his start in the business of print by marrying the daughter of a successful Nuremberg physician, Ulrich Pinder. Pinder owned a private press, which, with Peypus' aid, he used to print medical works and inspirational books. As a wedding gift upon their marriage in 1512, the couple received a press, two hundredweight of type, and fifty gulden. By 1515, Peypus had become a citizen and set up his own shop on the east side of Nuremberg's *Marktplatz*. He published items for the Reichstag, the city, and a number of Lutheran works in addition to a "magnificent" Bible, and the first Nuremberg edition of Luther's New Testament.¹¹ He also published eighteen pamphlets during 1524/25.

One popular pamphlet Peypus printed, authored by a middle-class layman named Hans Bechler, was *A Dialogue Between a Fox and a Wolf* (1524). The piece presented a conversation between two knights, one who had fought for Franz von Sickingen in the ill-fated Knights' Revolt of 1522/23, and another "who had tormented the empire until

¹¹ Benzing, *Buchdrucker des 16. Und 17. Jahrhunderts*, 354.

driven into exile.”¹² The two, represented as predatory animals in search of shelter during the coming winter, discuss how unwelcome they find themselves in all parts of the empire. The pamphlet was meant as a warning to “honest men” against the abiding hunger of the knightly class, a theme that would have resonated with a Council whose members and citizens were occasionally victimized by robber knights.

It was Peypus who printed Florentina von Oberweymer’s *An Account of How God Helped a Noble Nun Escape* (1524). This pamphlet, described in Chapter 3, was a sharp indictment of cloisters that likely intensified the resolve of those who condemned the cloister as an institution. Martin Luther added his interpretation of the event in his introductory remarks, characterizing Oberweymer’s escape from the clutches of the convent as a miracle. As we have seen, most members of the Council believed that cloisters were a drain on society, as did its artisan class. Peypus printed both Nuremberg editions of Oberweymer’s work.

Perhaps the most important pamphlet Peypus printed that year was the *Appeal and Petition of the Provosts and the Augustinian Prior of Nuremberg* (1524). The three had recently been excommunicated by the Bishop of Bamberg and this was their renewed appeal, which they published and also sent to the bishop. It may be recalled that Lazarus Spengler played a key role at this juncture, advising the City Council against dismissing the provosts and urging their protection. Spengler, as first secretary, also acted as the city’s censor. The pamphlet was doubtless published with his approval, and very possibly

¹² Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 84. The pamphlet ran to five editions, including two in Nuremberg.

with his backing, so that popular support for the provosts and prior could be solidified. Thus, the contests of local and imperial politics added another measure of dynamism to the Nuremberg print trade.

During the tumultuous year of 1525 Peypus printed two pamphlets by Luther that advanced views the Council must have heartily endorsed. One, *A Dreadful History and Judgement of God on Thomas Müntzer* (1525), was Luther's final word on the dangerous radical who had incited peasants to revolt but had been captured in May 1525 after leading a peasant army to slaughter at Frankenhausen. The other, *On the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants* (1525), was Luther's harsh commentary on the peasant revolt itself, wherein he urged authorities to "smite, stab, and slay indiscriminately" those who had rebelled against their lawful lords. The words were ill-timed in view of the reprisals that followed the peasant defeat, but would have had their point for a Council that still felt threatened by the possibility of peasant attack accompanied by support from urban artisans.

On June 10, 1525, Peypus was granted the privilege of printing the Council's *Ratsmandat* of June 2, an act designed to overcome any lingering sentiments among Nuremberg's artisans to join the peasants' cause.¹³ The pamphlet offered the good news that certain taxes were being eased and others abolished. Those with taxable property worth less than 100 gulden, for example, would henceforth be free from all but "emergency" taxes levied for support of empire, war, or police. The pamphlet

¹³ Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, 99.

thoughtfully added that the honorable Council was worrying “night and day” about the bodies, lives, and property of its citizens.¹⁴

Normally the Council frowned on any pamphlet written by the Sacramentarian preacher Andreas Carlstadt, but it appears to have welcomed Peypus’ publication of his *Clarification of How Carlstadt Regards and Desires His Teaching On the Highly Revered Sacrament and Other Matters to be Regarded* (1525). The pamphlet, which included a foreword by Martin Luther, was ostensibly Carlstadt’s recantation of his view that the Lord’s Supper was a symbolic act. The “recantation,” which consisted essentially of the author’s acknowledgment that the matter was unproven, was, in fact, the price Carlstadt was paying for taking shelter under Luther’s roof in the wake of the peasant revolt.¹⁵ Luther made the most of the situation, compelling Carlstadt to publicly call his Sacramentarian positions into question.

One has a hard time escaping the conclusion that if the Nuremberg City Council had a political “line” during the summer of 1525, Friedrich Peypus was following it. His choice of pamphlets, which cast doubt and loathing on radicals and rebels while spreading awareness of the Council’s fine leadership, almost puts one in mind of a modern public relations campaign. Peypus suffered no disciplinary actions at the hands of the Council during these years. He apparently won its “seal of approval” with his

¹⁴ Nuremberger Rat, *Was ein Erber Rate der Stat Nürnberg jrer Burgerschafft zu gut in mancherlai Artickeln / So sie sich habenn beschwern mögen nachgelassen und gelindert hat* (Nuremberg: Friedrich Peypus, 1525) Fiche 287/#831; Schmidt, *Reichsstädte, Reich und Reformation*, 169, 170

¹⁵ Andreas Carlstadt, *Erklerung wie Carlstat sein ler vonn dem hochwirdigen Sacrament und andere achtet unnd geachtet haben will* (Nuremberg: Friedrich Peypus, 1525) Fiche 114/#306.

commission to print the *Ratsmandat* of June 2. If Nuremberg had “establishment” publishers, one could argue that Peypus was one of them.

The same cannot be said for Hans Hergot (d. 1527). Hergot, whose place of birth is unknown, had only a brief career as a Nuremberg master. He may have worked as a journeyman before opening his own shop, or he may have worked as an itinerant printer, for he traveled much during his Nuremberg years, selling books and buying manuscripts like a man who knew the territory.¹⁶ In any case, his name does not appear on the registers of any other German-speaking cities.¹⁷ Some seventy-five products have survived from Hergot’s press, including seven illustrated editions of Luther’s New Testament, an unusually high number. Hergot also printed a German-language Old Testament, music, and at least twenty-five pamphlets, demonstrating again the flexibility required of a printer in a demanding market.

Hergot was accused more than once of reprinting others’ work, thus stealing a share of the market that rightfully belonged to them.¹⁸ As we have seen, Luther once suggested that Hergot was behind the theft of devotional pieces from Wittenberg presses. He later complained that Hergot was also printing false copies of the New Testament. Hergot’s output includes both Catholic and scathingly anti-papal literature. He first appears in Council minutes in 1524, with his shop identified with the clandestine

¹⁶ Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 129, n. 89; Rudolf Schmidt, *Deutsche Buchhändler. Deutsche Buchdrucker, Beiträge zu einer Firmengeschichte des deutschen Buchgewerbes* (Berlin: Verlag der Buchdruckerei Franz Weber, 1092-1908), in Mark Lehmsteadt, ed., *Geschichte des deutschen Buchwesens* CD-ROM (Berlin: Directmedia, 2000), 6274.

¹⁷ Benzing, *Buchdrucker des 16. Und 17. Jahrhunderts*, 547. Benzing’s index lists only Nuremberg as a place of business for Hergot.

¹⁸ See above, p. 99. See also Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, p. 55.

publication of one of Thomas Müntzer's pamphlets.¹⁹ One's first impression of Hergot is that of an adroit hustler staying one step ahead of the authorities while stepping over his colleagues to be first to market with a popular piece—or at least second to market with a piece that had already proved popular.

Yet, the image of a man motivated solely by profit is not borne out by the preponderance of evidence. Hergot also troubled himself to travel from Nuremberg to Augsburg with a series of socially revolutionary pamphlets that had not passed Nuremberg's censorship so that his colleague, Phillip Ulhart, might see them through an Augsburg press.²⁰ Alone among Nuremberg printers, Hergot printed a pamphlet of his own, a utopian piece reflecting his own views and arguing for an equitable society. It was this pamphlet, *On the Transformation of a Christian Life* (1527) that ultimately led him to the block in Catholic Leipzig (see above, p. 108). But before that final episode, Hergot printed a wide variety of works chiefly characterized by their assured market. One example would be a pamphlet authored by Diepold Peringer, the "Peasant of Wöhrd."

Peringer, a street preacher, was actually a former priest passing himself off as an illiterate peasant from the Nuremberg suburb of Wöhrd. His thinking, as expressed in *A Sermon on Idolatry from a Peasant who can Neither Read nor Write* (1524), was heavy on Scriptural quotation and short on originality, reflecting only mainstream Lutheran thinking on the subject of images and the worship of saints. Yet, Peringer's first printed sermon had gone through two press runs in Nuremberg and five more in other locations,

¹⁹ Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, 25, 26.

²⁰ Künast, *Getruckt zu Augspurg*, 147, n. 239.

such was the popularity of a self-proclaimed illiterate who glibly quoted Latin, Greek and Hebrew.²¹ Vogler suggests that Peringer may have believed that his adoption of the wise peasant persona would best serve the cause of propagating the Reformation message.²² Indeed, Peringer was able to draw street crowds of three hundred or more.²³ Thus, in printing Peringer's sermon, Hergot knew he was printing the work of a popular figure.

Trading on popularity is almost certainly what he was trying to do by reprinting the *Ratsmandat* of June 2 and *A Dialogue Between a Fox and a Wolf*—both of which “belonged” to Friedrich Peypus. He was probably confident of that market too, for on his title page of *A Dialogue Between a Fox and a Wolf* he went to the added expense of a woodcut, albeit a crude one reflecting more haste than care. Peypus' woodcut for the same text, by contrast, is rich and detailed.²⁴

As we have seen, there was always a market for Luther's texts, and Hergot always had his eye out for them. Among those he printed were *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments* (1525), *Admonition to Peace, a Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia* (1525), and *An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants* (1525). The Council doubtless approved all these pamphlets, and one, the *Admonition to Peace*, even bears Hergot's name. It was an unusual sign of safe content for a Reformation printer to “sign” a pamphlet he published. It may also have

²¹ Köhler attributes one edition to Hieronymus Höltzel and one to Jobst Gutknecht, but Vogler believes both came from Höltzel.

²² Vogler, *Nürnberg 1524/25*, 144.

²³ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁴ Hans Bechler, *Ein Gespräch eyness Fuchs vnd Wolfs* (Nuremberg: Hans Hergot, 1524) Fiche 1378/#3633; *idem.*, *Ein Gespräch eynes Fuchs vnd Wolfs* (Nuremberg: Friedrich Peypus, 1524) Fiche 108/#286.

signaled Hergot's desire to be identified officially with Luther's text, which was critical of both, peasants and territorial nobles, a position the Council would endorse.

Some of Hergot's other pamphlets, however, would have drawn punishment had the Council learned that they came from his press. One such, by an unknown author, was *A Question and Answer from two Brothers on What Kind of Strange Animal is in Nuremberg* (1524).²⁵ In this brief, four-page dialogue a man describes to his brother a grotesque beast he saw when visiting the city during the imperial diet. The beast, clothed in scarlet, is the Roman antichrist, come to Nuremberg to influence the imperial estates. Like most unauthorized pieces, the pamphlet is printed in plain text without so much as a title border or an ornamental letter that would help authorities trace it back to its source. It is just the sort of piece that prompted the Council to "forbid the sale of derogatory verse and unsuitable pictures—with the warning that the punishment will be harsh where such things are found."²⁶ It is not known what time of year this pamphlet was printed, but if it appeared much before May it would have been available to a visiting public, in town for the meeting of the imperial diet.

Historians continue to turn over the evidence, but the chances are that Hergot was not in the city late in October, when Müntzer's pamphlet, *Manifest Exposé of False Faith* (1524), was printed in his shop. Otherwise he himself would have been fetched to appear

²⁵ Anonymus, *Ein Frag und Antwort von zweyen brudern / was fur ein seltzames Thier zu Nürnberg gewesen im Reyhstag nechst vergangen / geschickt von Rom zu beschawen das Teutsch landt* (Nuremberg: Hans Hergot, 1524) Fiche 266/#750.

²⁶ Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, 6. The warning dates from June 11, 1524.

before the Council, not four of his press workers.²⁷ The pamphlet was an exposition of Müntzer's theology. It made it clear that humanity's salvation depended on the divine spirit, not Holy Scripture. "If someone had never had sight or sound of the Bible at any time in his life he could still hold the one true Christian faith because of the true teachings of the spirit. . . ."²⁸ Here was an openly sectarian piece that took matters dangerously far from the reliable moorings of Scripture. Further, it was written by one who openly advocated every congregation's right to implement changes with or without the approval of political authorities. For a Council intent on controlling all matters within its city and advanced in its orientation toward Luther's *sola scriptura*, this call for spiritual democratization was unacceptable.

The workers confessed to printing the pamphlet in Hergot's absence and were warned not to print unapproved texts again. The provider of the text, however, was invited to contribute the cost of 400 pamphlets into the city's charitable fund.²⁹ Given Hergot's habitual travels, during which he left the shop in the able care of his wife, Kunigunde, his absence is not implausible.

Blickle questions whether Hergot authored *On the Transformation of a Christian Life*, a utopian work that detailed a society without nobles, without private property, and without cities.³⁰ All would be godly in that pastoral world, with no dues or rents to be

²⁷ Vogler, *Nürnberg 1524/25*, 216. Hergot's press workers, who boldly placed Müntzer's name on the title page along with "Mülhausen" as the alleged site of publication, also included a title border easily traceable to Hergot's shop. Significantly, no subsequent work of Müntzer came from Hergot's press.

²⁸ Quoted in Goetze, *Thomas Müntzer*, 123.

²⁹ This was likely Heinrich Pfeiffer, a close associate of Müntzer. Vogler, *Nürnberg 1524/25*, 217.

³⁰ Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525*, 150-154.

paid and with all belonging to one, reformed church. Everything would be held in common, with children given to those best able to raise them. There were, Hergot noted, three tables in the world. One was overflowing with food, one held a moderate amount, and the third lacked everything. God, he said, would overturn both the overflowing and the poor table and approve only the moderate table. Most historians credit Hergot as the author of this work, which, in its yearning for social equality, appears to link urban and rural concerns.³¹ The pamphlet was distributed early in 1527 and purchased by students in Leipzig, where it came to the attention of authorities.

It was during one of Hergot's road trips to Zwickau later that year that he was identified and arrested on the orders of Duke Georg von Sachsen. Whether Hergot was taken into custody because he was thought the author of the pamphlet or merely a distributor cannot be conclusively established, for his trial records have disappeared. Despite his wife Kunigunde's pleas, the City of Nuremberg refused to intercede on his behalf. Hergot was convicted in Dresden and beheaded in Leipzig May 20, 1527. Kunigunde continued running his presses until 1539, adopting as a printer's mark the image of a beheaded swan, a subtle but persistent form of protest enabled by the print culture of the time.³²

³¹ Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 130. A copy of *On the Transformation of a Christian Life* found in the Leipzig City Archive in the nineteenth century included an envelope with the following note: "Hans Hergot of Nuremberg's seditious booklet over which he was executed here with a sword. Monday after Cantate, Anno Dom. 1527." Kapp, *Geschichte des Deutschen Buchhandels*, 908. Those who consider Hergot's authorship likely include Adolf Laube and Hans Werner Seiffert, *Flugschriften der Baurernkriegszeit* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1975), 642; Michael G. Baylor, *The Radical Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 210, n. 1; Schwitalla, *Deutsche Flugschriften 1460-1525*, 308.

³² Götze, *Hochdeutschen Drucker*, 35.

Conflicting and incomplete though the evidence is, Hergot finally presents the image of a small, struggling printer who learned his craft in a hard school and developed the sharp elbows necessary to survive there. He may not have been a pleasant colleague to have in town, but he evidently believed in the possibility of a new social order, which he attempted to advance through his own printed works and publishing endeavors.

Among the printers whose work Hergot was admonished for reprinting during his years in Nuremberg was Jobst Gutknecht, who had been a printer there since 1514. Gutknecht printed official booklets, songs and meistersinger works, plus schoolbooks, news sheets, popular medical works, devotional tracts, and an extraordinarily large number of Luther's works. Vogler calls Gutknecht "the most diligent printer of Luther's works in the empire."³³

Perhaps the most striking fact about Jobst Gutknecht, however, is the great variety of pamphlets he managed to publish during the years 1524/25—at least thirty-five—and yet avoid trouble with the City Council. Gutknecht was involved with an impressive range of authors and ideas. Yet, like Friedrich Peypus, Gutknecht seems to have confined his pamphlet work to items that would influence audiences in ways the Council would approve. If the Council hoped to shape public discourse in ways that would lead to proper Christian behavior, including acquiescence in the payment of taxes, then printers like Gutknecht were prepared to disseminate messages intended to accomplish those ends. If printers like Gutknecht needed occasional material to print, associates of the Council

³³ Vogler, *Nürnberg, 1524/25*, 39.

were in a position to provide it. Gutknecht serves as a good example of an emerging symbiosis between printer and government.

A look at the content of his pamphlet output suggests that Gutknecht's presses nearly always promoted positive messages. One of his clients was the Nuremberg artist and pamphleteer Hans Greiffenberger. The Greiffenberger pamphlets, three of which Gutknecht printed in the years 1524/25, include *A Comforting Admonition* (1524), *A Short Concept on Good Works* (1524), and *A Warning about the Devil* (1524). All these works displayed Greiffenberger's name prominently on the title page, suggesting the author felt he had nothing to fear from their publication. Greiffenberger urged readers to turn away from worldly matters and place their faith in God; to place the spirit over the flesh; to pray privately, not publicly; and to rely not on reason, which was subject to human error, but to rely on the spirit. These were hardly dangerous positions to take in early Reformation Nuremberg. But some time during 1524 Greiffenberger's reading of the Sacramentarian preacher Andreas Carlstadt led him to believe that the Eucharist was to be taken symbolically, that the bread and wine remained so and never became the body and blood of Christ. It was a belief that brought him before the Council to defend himself against charges of leading people into a new sect, but it never found its way into any pamphlets, and thus never involved Jobst Gutknecht.³⁴ It is entirely possible, if speculative, that Gutknecht was asked, but declined to print such content.

³⁴ Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, 26; Dietrich Wünsch in Andreas Osiander d.Ä., *Schriften und Briefe, 1522 bis März 1525*, Bd. 1 (Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gerd Mohn, 1975), 267.

Sermons, as we have seen, were commonly turned into pamphlets, but one particular sermon by Andreas Osiander, the noted Lutheran preacher of St. Lorenz, had a resonance in Nuremberg. In April 1525, as the Peasant Revolt was brewing in regions to the west of the city, Gutknecht printed Osiander's sermon on Matthew 17:24. The passage, printed in full, describes Jesus directing the Apostle Simon to pay the half-shekel tax for them both, using a shekel found in the mouth of a fish. It will be recalled that the City Council had had to deal with a popular tax revolt less than a year earlier, a revolt supported by the city's artisans. One senses here a cooperative effort among Council, clergy, and printer to assure the public that paying taxes was an act Jesus Himself approved of, and thus perhaps forestall further tax demonstrations. It may also be recalled that taxes were actually reduced the following June, an act publicized via pamphlet (see above, p. 119).

Gutknecht also printed both Nuremberg editions of City Secretary Lazarus Spengler's *A Brief Concept Through Which a Truer Christ, in All of His Nature and Changes, Should, with God and those Near Him, be Regarded* (1525). It was meant as an instructional pamphlet, an elementary guide to the unlearned on proper Reformation thought. It advised readers to let the daily challenge of the cross strengthen their belief, and let good works flow from the heart, like fruits from a good tree.³⁵ The pamphlet was written just prior to the March 1525 colloquy that led to the final break with Rome, a good time to provide a doctrinal standard for a public likely to attend and perhaps judge the points made by Old Church and Lutheran clergy.

³⁵ Berndt Hamm and Wolfgang Huber in *Lazarus Spengler Schriften*, Bd. 1, *Schriften der Jahre 1509 bis Juni 1525* (Gütersloh: Güterslohe Verlagshaus, 1995), 412.

Another city secretary, albeit one from Reutlingen, was Benedikt Gretzinger, whose forty-page pamphlet describing the function of the true church went through three editions on Gutknecht's press. Everyone, said Gretzinger, was made a priest through Christ, and so "could make offerings to God, pray for each other, and teach one another the Word of God."³⁶ Yet, he also emphasized man's powerlessness, and made it clear that law was essential to the functioning of any Christian community. As Chrisman says, city secretaries like Spengler and Gretzinger "determined the final form of the urban reformation."³⁷ In printing the work of such high civil servants, Gutknecht expanded the civic context of religious debate and associated print with power, to the advantage of each.

Nor were the contributions of territorial princes forgotten. A pamphlet by Casimir, Margraf von Brandenburg-Kulmbach and Georg, Margraf von Brandenburg-Ansbach, *How the Revolt and Insurrection Had Not a Little To Do With Inept Preaching* (1525), was published in August, about three months after the Peasant Revolt had been put down. The message alluded to none of the brutality that had followed the revolt, but it did make a distinction between "inept, godless preachers" whose errors and falsehoods had presumably led to the insurrection, and "talented, Christian preachers" who preached "the pure, clear Word of God."³⁸ Examples of the pure, clear Word of God included Romans

³⁶ Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 215.

³⁷ Ibid., 207.

³⁸ Kasimir, Mgf. von Brandenburg-Kulmbach and Georg, Mgf. Von Brandenburg-Ansbach, *Wie die gewesen empörung und auffrurn / nit den wenigsten tayl / auss ungeschickten predigen entstanden findt* (Nuremberg: Jobst Gutknecht, 1525) Fiche 108/#281.

13, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities,” and Titus 3, “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work.”³⁹

As with Peypus, Gutknecht’s pattern was to publish material that was safe and that found favor with the City Council. Perhaps it was in return for his reliability that he received prestigious material to print from important men like Spengler, making the relationship a symbiotic one. Pfeiffer places Gutknecht in the same category as Petreius and Peypus, printers who stood in “close agreement” with the Council.⁴⁰

But symbiosis alone does not adequately describe the nature of the relationship between print, power, and leading opinion in Nuremberg. The last of Nuremberg’s eight printers, and the one who produced the greatest number of pamphlets, thirty-eight, was also the one with the greatest history of trouble with the Council. Hieronymus Höltzel presents an intriguing portrait as both the last of Nuremberg’s printers from the era of the incunabula, and the first to be jailed for something he printed.

Höltzel, whose birthdate is unknown, came to Nuremberg from the Bavarian town of Traunstein, not far from Salzburg. He began printing in 1496 and became a citizen of Nuremberg in 1500. He printed the *Ludus Dianae*, a five-act masque complete with music, by the “archhumanist” scholar Conrad Celtis for the Emperor Maximilian in

³⁹ Rom. 13:1; Ti. 3:1, Revised Standard Bible.

⁴⁰ Pfeiffer, *Quellen*, xvii.

1501. He printed all texts associated with Dürer's woodcuts in 1510/11. Like Peypus, he was commissioned from time to time to print government documents. Other work included calendars, schoolbooks, and classic texts. In his longevity, his status as a citizen, and some of his prestigious early work, Höltzel would seem to present the profile of another "establishment" printer. Yet, no printer is cited as often as Höltzel in the Council minutes of 1524/25 as a troublemaker.

Höltzel got his first taste of the Nuremberg *Loch*, the cellars beneath the city hall, in 1514 after printing an unapproved pamphlet on the Hungarian peasant revolt led that summer by György Dózsa, a professional soldier. The event, says Claus, shows "for the first time the marked interest of the printer in the compelling social issues of his era."⁴¹ It was an interest Höltzel evidently maintained into the Reformation era. Most of the texts Höltzel printed in 1524/25 were approved, as they had to be, but one senses a different product coming from Höltzel's press than from Peypus' or Gutknecht's. There is precious little from nobility, save for two reprints of Charles V's Edict of Worms, which Höltzel knew would not be enforced. On the other hand, he printed Argula von Grumbach's *A poetic answer to one from the University of Ingolstat* (1524), which, while from a noblewoman, effectively one-upped a male student. In Höltzel's hands, print did not so much support as challenge the proper norms and manners of urban and urbane society.

Aside from preachers, who tended to dominate any printer's pamphlet repertoire, Höltzel had a particular affinity for the skilled technicians and artisans who were

⁴¹ Helmut Claus, "Die Endphase der Offizin Hieronymus Höltzels in Nürnberg," in Ursula Altmann and Hans-erich Teitge, eds. *Studien zur Buch und Bibliotheksgeschichte* (Berlin: DSB, 1976), 98.

attempting to make their contribution to the Reformation movement. He provided a vital platform for members of that rank who sought to participate in the making of public opinion. Hölzel printed work by Haug Marschalck, an Augsburg soldier who wrote movingly of Jesus' life, and Georg Motschilder, a Wittenberg gunner whose rhetoric against the papacy was inflammatory. He also printed three of the four dialogues of Hans Sachs, the cobbler/poet of Nuremberg.

Sachs, who had been educated eight years in the Latin school, was well read in the works of Luther and others. His dialogues, published in 1524, went through multiple reprints in several cities, indicating how well they hit the popular mood.⁴² As Chrisman points out, Sachs' characters "exposed the stereotypes of the time."⁴³ They also covered a wide range of viewpoints and social problems, expressing a genuine concern for how the Reformation was affecting social relations. Balzer has suggested that Sachs was acting as a mouthpiece for the Council or influential preachers, a view Broadhead rejects based on a close study of the dialogues.⁴⁴ Sachs, he points out, was not only critical of authorities, but clearly advanced an agenda originating in the artisan ranks.

Sach's dialogues tend to take a teacher-student approach, with a layman disputing and correcting a cleric. The layperson proves the more adroit with his biblical citations and arguments, while the cleric appears less practiced, and at times almost ignorant. That is not to say he has no response to the layman's points, only that he is finally backed into

⁴² Vogler, *Nürnberg 1524/25*, 152. Sach's first dialogue went through eleven known reprints; his second nine; his third four; and his fourth eleven.

⁴³ Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 161.

a corner and bested. In *A Discussion on the Vain Works of the Clergy* (1524), the tone is set early when two begging Franciscans are rebuked by a layman, Peter, who says he will give his alms directly to poor peasants, who work for a living. When the monks point out that they perform charitable works, Peter counters that the monks give only what they themselves do not want, that those who need charity deserve the best a Christian can give. Thus, Sachs advances not only an anti-clerical message, but also a social message on proper Christian generosity that was meant for the evangelical reader.

The social message is particularly strong in *A Discussion on Avarice* (1524), which was published shortly after the tithe revolt. A cleric, Romanus, is permitted to make some telling points against a layman, a rich burgher named, appropriately enough, Reichsbürger. “Your new evangelism turns your eyes outward only, toward us monks and priests,” says Romanus. “You say we alone are avaricious, but you forget about yourselves . . . You buy up everything you can think of in advance, wine grain and salt, all of which are hoarded to make a profit for yourself.”⁴⁵ Romanus is equally critical of the employment of piece workers (*Stückwerker*), who are used to force down wages. Again, the communal spirit of Nuremberg is invoked to regulate behavior, but here it is voiced by an Old Church cleric, the common enemy of evangelicals. Broadhead calls this dialogue difficult to interpret on account of the points scored by Romanus that go unrefuted.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Philip Broadhead, “The Contribution of Hans Sachs to the Debate on the Reformation in Nuremberg: A Study of the Religious Dialogues of 1524,” in Robert Aylett and Peter Skrine, eds., *Hans Sachs and Folk Theatre in the Late Middle Ages* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 49, 50.

⁴⁵ Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform*, 192.

⁴⁶ Broadhead, “The Contribution of Hans Sachs,” 55.

It is possible, however, to see Sach's rhetorical device as a derivation of one used in *The Reformation of the Emperor Sigismund* (ca. 1438), an influential reform treatise that had been reprinted as recently as 1522. "Everyone writing on the question of reform in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century was familiar with it," says Strauss.⁴⁷ If that includes the well-read Sachs, he may well have used as his inspiration the story of a Turk challenged to become a Christian. In response, the Turk points out that "not one of you truly loves Christ You take away your neighbor's goods and wealth; you destroy your fellow man's dignity; you even claim his person for your own If only you had changed your ways, turned to your God and kept your old laws, you would have defeated us long ago!"⁴⁸ How sharp is a justified rebuke from a common enemy, and how useful when the goal is to point out flaws among one's fellows.

Popular though it was, Sachs' work was not always approved and sometimes led to the Council's irritation. A derogatory work on the papacy brought Sachs before that body in 1527, where he was, in effect, admonished to stick to shoemaking. His subsequent work steers clear of confessional polemic and includes proportionally more moral satire, a genre of discourse expanded via print.⁴⁹ Yet, Sachs could always be relied on to reflect the view of the honest artisan. In the *Discussion of Vain Works*, the layman Peter counters the Franciscans' claim of a hard life by reminding them that that the artisan works the whole day, eats poor food, and is awakened early by his children. That

⁴⁷ Gerald Strauss, *Manifestations of Discontent in Germany on the Eve of the Reformation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁹ Wittman, *Geschichte des Deutschen Buchhandels*, 7808.

was the kind of life many in Nuremberg and other cities could relate to and goes a long way toward explaining Sach's ongoing appeal.

Sach's works, while popular, accounts for only four pamphlet runs out of thirty-five that took place in Hölzel's shop in 1524. Hölzel also busied himself printing five pamphlets by Luther, two by Diepold Peringer, two by Johannes Bugenhagen, and two by Andreas Carlstadt, among others. It was publication of the Sacramentarian Carlstadt's work that set the stage for Hölzel's undoing.

On the Anti-Christian Misuse of the Lord's Bread and Cup (1524) was one of Carlstadt's tracts characterizing the Eucharist as a symbolic ceremony. Hölzel printed the work in November 1524. As Buck points out, "In a state where the secular power defines right belief, heterodoxy implies a challenge to that governing authority."⁵⁰ The City Council had not yet made its final break with Rome, but it had taken a political position to defend its provosts in the face of Church and imperial displeasure. Thus, it was the *de facto* controlling power over Nuremberg's churches, a position from which it asserted its right to maintain spiritual as well as secular order. The Council enacted a resolution on December 16 to seize Carlstadt's work and seek out the one who had printed it. That path led to Hölzel's shop.

A search of the premises revealed another work printed and ready for distribution, Thomas Müntzer's *A Highly Provoked Vindication and Refutation of the Unspiritual*

⁵⁰ Quoted in Vogler, *Nürnberg 1524/25*, 303, n. 209.

Soft-Living Flesh in Wittenberg (1524). The polemical piece had been written in response to Luther's *Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit* (1524), wherein the Great Reformer suggested that Satan had possessed Müntzer into leading the mob against the Word of God and secular authorities. Goertz argues that Müntzer's *Vindication and Refutation* followed his *Manifest Exposé of False Faith*, written to prepare the theological ground—that the two belong together as a response to Luther's attack. As we have seen, the *Manifest Exposé* came off of Hans Hergot's press at the end of October; copies of the *Vindication and Refutation* were found in Hölzel's shop late in November. Goertz and others believe Müntzer was personally in Nuremberg at some point between the end of October and the beginning of December to see his works through the press, though Vogler notes that the evidence is inconclusive.⁵¹

Hölzel revealed under questioning that he had received the text from a "wayfaring stranger," who remains unnamed in Council minutes. The stranger was sent away with a scolding and a warning not to attempt to publish unapproved texts.⁵² Hölzel was grilled for several days on any similar texts he had printed. Although he did not reveal it, there was yet another Carlstadt pamphlet in production that had escaped detection when city authorities went searching. The first five pages of that press run, *Dialogue or Conversation Booklet* (1524/25), are from Hölzel's press. They were clandestinely sent along with the source text to George Erlinger of Bamberg, who completed the run.⁵³

⁵¹ Goertz, *Thomas Müntzer*, 166, n. 6. Those who place Müntzer in Nuremberg include Harold Grimm, *Lazarus Spengler*, 96; Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, 155

⁵² Candidates for this mystery man include Hans Hut or Martin Reinhardt. Claus, "Die Endphase," 99.

⁵³ Ibid.

It is unclear how long Hölzel was held, but the absence of exemplars from his press suggests he was not back at work much before March 1525. Only three pamphlets come from his press that year. They include *The Just and Proper Principal Articles of the Peasantry* (1525), *A New Dialogue or Conversation between a Nobleman and a Monk* (1525), and *To the Assembly of Common Peasantry* (1525) (see above, Chapter 3, p. 14). This last pamphlet, among the most incendiary of the Reformation, was the final one for Hölzel, for shortly after it was clandestinely printed late in May it was traced back to him. This time the Council had had enough. A pamphlet that justified rebellion against authority in a time of unrest deserved a severe response, particularly since Hölzel had proved to be incorrigible. The Council might have had Hölzel executed for treason, but chose instead to banish him from Nuremberg, essentially cutting him off from his living. He was apparently permitted to return by 1527 to work as a compositor for Johann Petreius, but in 1529 his name is stricken from the city register with the notation, “No longer working.” His press, in the meantime, had gone to—or more likely been taken over by—his son-in-law, Hans Eichenauer. A scant four pieces have survived from Eichenauer’s press, which apparently ceased operating after 1528, its components falling finally into the hands of Jobst Gutknecht.⁵⁴

Alone among Nuremberg printers, Hieronymus Hölzel repeatedly engaged in risky presswork. Hans Hergot lost his life because of a pamphlet he authored, but he was away from Nuremberg’s safe confines when arrested and may not have sensed the danger his work had put him in. Hergot never defied the Council and, in fact, traveled to Augsburg

⁵⁴ Ibid., 103, 104.

Conclusion

“The printers of the Reformation may rival the humanists as being one of the first identifiable secular groups bringing their support to the cause of the Reformation.”¹ That assessment by Richard Cole is certainly supportable by evidence, but it calls to mind the image of a unified occupational band whose members have agreed to work together toward a common goal. An analysis of Nuremberg’s printers suggests that the craft of print, at least within those walls, was a variegated one whose members were far from united in their ideologies, political loyalties, or social concerns. The chief evidence for that conclusion lies in the products they chose to produce.

The most important decision printers made on an ongoing basis was the selection of material to publish. The great variety of texts published in Nuremberg in 1524/25 suggests there was a wide spectrum of material to choose from. On an economic scale, products ranged from expensive folio-sized books meant for scholars to flimsy pamphlets meant for anyone with a *pfennig* to spend or an ear to hear with. On an ideological scale, products ranged from Catholic to sectarian tracts. On a political scale, they ranged from safe, instructional tomes to incendiary pamphlets. Exemplars from various points along each of these scales have been identified as the products of Nuremberg’s presses. The selections Nuremberg’s printers made from among the available texts are the keys to determining how each saw his particular position within the economic, ideological and political dynamics of the time.

¹ Cole, “Printers: Unsung Heroes,” 330.

Nuremberg's printers worked in a highly competitive atmosphere where risk often had to be weighed against economics. The safe text was not always the most popular text, but any text had to be popular enough to avoid economic loss. If the printer believed in a particular ideology or harbored a certain social agenda he might select texts that advanced it, but if that placed him at odds with political authorities he could lose his press run or even his living. Printers dealt with such choices in several different ways. They might dip a toe into the pool of risk, and then withdraw it when it proved too hot, as Stuchs did; they might willingly serve authority and print those items the authorities wanted to see, as Peypus and Gutknecht did; they might wait to see what was selling and scramble to print something similar or rely on the reprint market to sustain them, as Hergot did; they might test the limits of authority by repeatedly printing items that advanced a certain socio-political agenda, as Hölzel did; or they might essentially ignore the market, as Andreae, Petreius, and Wandereisen did. All these printers printed Reformation texts, but their intentions were worlds apart.

Even in their specific approaches to pamphlet publication, one finds surprising differences among printers, some of them counterintuitive. One might expect, for example, that a printer who catered to a popular market, as Hölzel did, would specialize in the shortest, most affordable pamphlets, while a printer who printed texts pleasing to the authorities might consider price to be less important. Yet, Friedrich Peypus, who appears to have followed the Council's interests and who printed only eighteen pamphlets in 1524/25, printed fourteen of that total—a full seventy-eight percent—at an inexpensive eight pages or less. Hieronymus Hölzel, who printed thirty-eight pamphlets aimed

toward an audience of artisans, printed but sixteen—only forty-two percent of his output—at eight pages or less.² Size and cost were evidently not as important in the market as content.³ As we saw earlier, Gutknecht ran a relatively costly, forty-page pamphlet through three editions. Although we do not know the size of any of his press runs, it cannot have been a casual matter to purchase paper, re-set type, and prepare such a pamphlet for distribution three separate times. The market must have spoken loudly.

It is another commonplace that woodcuts added expense to a pamphlet and were not resorted to unless a printer was certain of a market. Yet, the printer's desire to send a visual message to his audience appears to have had more to do with that decision than did economics. Jobst Gutknecht and Friedrich Peypus were prosperous printers who could have afforded to produce woodcuts, but only about five percent of their respective outputs included woodcut illustrations. Hans Hergot, a struggling printer, included woodcuts with twenty percent of his pamphlets. Hieronymus Höltzel, aiming his work toward an audience of artisans and peasants, included woodcuts with thirty-seven percent of his pamphlets. Each of the dialogues he ran for Hans Sachs had a large woodcut dominating the title page. The last pamphlet he ran, *To the Assembly of Common Peasantry*, included a woodcut of the pope being cranked over a wheel toward the waiting spears of a peasant army. Clearly, woodcut illustrations proliferated in “down-scale” pamphlets, suggesting that multi-media public discourse grew out of the printers' desire to reach and serve wider audiences.

² Köhler, *Bibliographie der Flugschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts*.

³ While we do not know what a printer charged for any particular product, it is probably safe to assume that the economics of a competitive market did not permit printers to sell at a loss very often, if at all.

Unfortunately from Hölzel's point of view, the entire run of *To the Assembly of Common Peasantry* was confiscated by the City Council before it could reach its audience. That same body had earlier confiscated pamphlets by the radical preacher Thomas Müntzer and the Sacramentarian preacher Andreas Carlstadt. The Nuremberg City Council, which insisted on exercising the right of prior restraint over each and every print product in the city, was obviously aware of the power of the press and its ability to foment public opinion. When studying any print product from Nuremberg we must also envision the Council standing close by in a state of approval or disapproval, making its presence felt at every run in every print shop. It is the problematic relationship between the Nuremberg City Council and the printers of Nuremberg that forms the crux of this analysis, for it was under terms set by the Council that printers assumed their roles, whether for conformity or dissent.

Elton, as we saw in Chapter 3, termed a pamphlet campaign conducted by England's Henry VIII in the 1530s as the first public relations campaign ever conducted by a government. Henry had a specific political agenda to follow, and he used pamphlet literature to advance it. But the Nuremberg City Council had an agenda too, albeit a pragmatic one that played off of the shifting political interests of internal and external groups. Its ongoing objective was to maintain order—which, in the context of 1524/25, included keeping its citizens from forming independent alliances with rebellious peasants or introducing new ideologies that could lead to competing confessions. One means the Council used to achieve this objective was pamphlet literature, released into the stream of public discourse by reliable printers like Peypus and Gutknecht. In return, the Council

channeled a modest but welcome amount of exclusive material to those same printers. Because of their mutual reliance, this relationship may be termed symbiotic.

Höltzel, who had once enjoyed the privilege of printing government work, chose the path of dissent, attempting to put the world right despite the Council's ongoing program to maintain the social and political *status quo* and its power to police dissenters. We can speculate about Höltzel's motives, asking whether he had always been a radical at heart or harbored an eschatological agenda. The important thing is that Höltzel routinely published the views and concerns of common men and at great personal risk even attempted to print and distribute texts inciting rebellion. Scribner, who has written extensively on the appeal visual propaganda had to common folk in a society of limited literacy, points out the fatalism associated with the image of a wheel of fortune. The wheel displayed on the title page of *To the Assembly of Common Peasantry* is accompanied by this caption: "Here is the hour and time of the wheel of fortune. God knows who will remain supreme."⁴ Höltzel may himself have felt fatalistic when he printed the piece, but, like the peasant army depicted in the woodcut, was prepared to cast everything on the chance for social revolution and lasting change.

The outcome of Nuremberg's commerce in pamphlet literature was not the sudden, radical alteration of society envisioned by the author of *To the Assembly of Common Peasantry*, but it did carry elements of a revolution even so. The outcome was the gradual democratization of discourse. The issues of the day were regularly, if not

⁴ Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk*, 122.

periodically, presented in the vernacular to be shared with any and all who might wish to read or hear them. It is probably the variegated nature of the Nuremberg printing community that enabled this democratization of discourse. Print invited the participation of those who earlier had had no voice, even as it admonished people for lodging protests over taxes. Print provided a platform for the artisan, the woman, and the radical author, presenting such people as examples to be applauded or condemned, and encouraging the rage, contention, and fruitful discussion that followed. And it was, of course, print that served the City Council of Nuremberg in its attempt to instruct its citizens on the meaning of events and to maintain order. To the extent “official” pamphlet literature helped channel public opinion away from the radical social doctrines the Council feared, it may also have given the Council the freedom to navigate the political and diplomatic waters of sixteenth-century Germany without the added burdens of urban tumult or insurrection.

The role of the printer in Reformation Nuremberg was to act as an agent of influence for any one of a variety of clients. In a time of sudden, unpredictable change, his role was to persuade, incite, inspire, arouse, or control. Whatever his motivation, whether economic, ideological or political, and whether his efforts were put forth in a spirit of conformity or dissent, the Nuremberg printer widened and deepened the channels of discourse. Because of the printer’s work, people no longer heard only the proclamations of governing authorities. They now heard a cacophony of persuasive and contending voices advancing a variety of views through a variety of arguments, which readers and listeners were forced to sort out through discussion. It was this sorting out

that created the “Reformation public,” whose opinion, once reached, made it an equal player in the politics of the city.

Primary Source: The *Handbuch der Nation* (1524) is a primary source that can be found in *Handbuch der Nation*, edited by Hans-Joachim Köhler (Frankfurt, 1974), 11-12. The *Handbuch der Nation* is a collection of letters and documents that were written by Hans Holzer, a member of the *Handbuch der Nation* in 1524.

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- Anonymous. *Die Artikel vnd bewerbung derselbigen / so die Prelaten / Ebt / Stifft vnd Closter haben eyn gelegt / in Lutherischen sachen / am tag des gesprechs vor dem Durchleüchtigen Hochgebornen Fürsten und herrn Herrn Casimir / Marggrafen / &c.* Nuremberg: Hans Hergot, 1524. [Fiche 176/ #488]
- Anonymous. *Artikel und Ursprung der Waldensen: und der armen von Lugdun / auch Joannis wicleffen / vnd Joannis Hussen.* Nuremberg: Jobst Gutknecht, 1524. [Fiche 568/ #1454]
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- Anonymous. *Ein Frag vnd Antwort von zweyen brudern / was fur ein seltzames Thier zu Nürmberg gewesen im Reychsstag nechst vergangen / geschickt von Rom zu beschawen das Teutsch landt.* Nuremberg: Hans Hergot, 1524. [Fiche 266/ #750]
- Anonymous. *Eyn freüntlichs gesprech /zwischen eynem Parfusser münch / auß der Prouintz Osterreich / der Obseruantz / vnd einem Löffelmacher / mit namen Hans*

Stösser / gar lustig zulesen / vnd ist der recht grundt. Nuremberg: Hieronymus Hölzel, 1524. [Fiche 1099/ #2794]

Anonymous. *Eyn gesprech / von dem gemaynen Schwabacher Kasten / als durch bruder Hainrich / Knecht Ruprecht / Kemerin / Spüler / vnd jrem Maister / des Handetwercks der Wülen Tüchmacher.* Nuremberg: Hieronymus Hölzel, 1524. [Fiche 268/ #755]

Anonymous. *Die gründtlichen vnd rechten hawpt Artickel / aller Pawrschafft vnd hyndersessen der Geystlichen vnd Weltlichen Oberkeyten / von welchen sy sich gantz hart vndd hoch beschwert vermaynen.* Nuremberg: Hieronymus Hölzel, 1525. [Fiche 286/ #826]

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Bechler, Hans. *Ein Gesprech eyneß Fuchs vnd Wolffs / so die andern Füchs vnd Wölff auff den Stayger waldt zusamen geschickt / such zu vnder reden / wo vnd wie die beyde parthey den wintter sich halten vnd neren wollen.* Nuremberg: Hans Hergot, 1524. [Fiche 1378/ #3633]

———. *Ein Gesprech eyneß Fuchs vnd wolffs / so die andern Füchs vnd wölff auff den Stayger wald zusammen geschickt/ sich zu vnterreden / wo vnd wie die beyde partheyen / den winter sich halten vnd neren wollen.* Nuremberg: Friedrich Peypus, 1524. [Fiche 108/ #286]

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- Greiffenberger, Hans. *Ein kurtzer begriff von güten wercken / die got behagen / vnd der welt ein spot seind/ yetzt ein grosse klag / wie niemandt mer güts thû / vnnd aller gots dinst vnter gee / wie sie gedunckt in jrem syn/ Ein antwort was gütte werck seind*. Nuremberg: Jobst Gutknecht, 1524. [Fiche 343/ #967]

- . *Ein trostliche ermanung / den angefochtenn im gewissen / von wegen gethaner sündt / wie vnnd wo mit / sie getröst werden / Den Sathan / sich nit erschrecken lassen.* Nuremberg: Jobst Gutknecht, 1524. [Fiche 1198/ #3020]
- . *Ein warnung vor dem Teuffel / der sich wider übt mit seinem dendelmarckt/ vnter einem gleissended schein/ in mercklichen stückenn / des Christenlichen lebens betreffen.* Nuremberg: Jobst Gutknecht, 1524. [Fiche 1198/ #3019]
- Gretzinger, Benedikt. *Ein vnüberwindtlich Beschirm büchlein von Haupt Artickeln / vnnd fürnemlichen puncten der götlichen geschriff Auss dem Alten vnnd Newen Testament / Mit bewerten beschlußreden / einem yeden rechten Christen menschen zů handhabung der götlichen warhait wider die verfolger der selben / nützlich zůgebrauchen.* Nuremberg: Jobst Gutknecht, 1524. [Fiche 1477/ #3880]
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- Kasimir, Mgf. von Brandenburg-Kulmbach, Georg, Mgf. Von Brandenburg-Ansbach. *Der Durchleüchtigen Hochgebornen Fürsten vnd herren Herren Casimirn vnd herren Georgen / als der eltesten Regirenden gebrüder/ Marggrauen zů*

Brandenburg &c. meiner gnedigen herrn / anzeygen / wie die gewesen empörung vnd auffrührn/ nit den wenigsten tayl / auß vngeschicketu [sic] predigen entstanden sindt. Nuremberg: Jobst Gutknecht, 1525. [Fiche 108/ #281]

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Korn, Gallus. *Warum die Kirch vier Euangelisten hat angenommen / eyn papistisch frag / Ein Christliche antwort darüber / mit außlegung des worts Christi / Ich hab euch noch vil zú sagen. Zú Titon am ersten.* Nuremberg: Hieronymus Hölzel, 1524. [Fiche 80/ #214]

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